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CHAS. C. E. R.



Ogbourne. Sculp. sc.

JOHN OF GAUNT,
King of Castille and Leon,
and Duke of Lancaster.

From a Window in the Library of All Souls College at Oxford.

Published Feb'y 14. 1804. by Richard Phillips N^o 71 S^t Pauls Church Yard London.

BY WILLIAM GODWIN.

SHAKESPEAR.

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LIFE

OF

CHAUCER.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

OUTLINE OF CHAUCER'S POEM OF THE HOUSE OF FAME.

WHILE Chaucer held the office of controller of the customs, he wrote his poem entitled the House of Fame. This is inferred by Mr. Tyrwhit with sufficient probability from a passage in the poem which seems to have an allusion to his official employments, and which we shall presently have occasion to quote.

The House of Fame is a Dream; a species of composition which continually presents itself to our observation, among the productions of the thirteenth and following

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Its general
merits.

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centuries. It is full of imagination; a beauty congenial to, and not to be dispensed with in, a performance of this class. It abounds in passages of a philosophical cast, as might well be expected from a mind like Chaucer's, in the full maturity of its faculties. And it is interspersed, like the poem of William de Lorris and John de Meun, with traits of human nature and strokes of humour, excellences not most obviously to be looked for in a composition the subject of which is supernatural.

Prologue.

In a sort of prologue to his poem, Chaucer enumerates, with a singular fertility of invention, all the different hypotheses that may be framed, and solutions that may be assigned, concerning the cause of the phenomenon of dreams. He then proceeds to observe that

— never ^a sithen I was borne,

Ne no man ^b ellés me beforne,

^a since.

^b else.

^c Metten, I trowé stedfastly,

So wonderfull a dreme as I.

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ver. 59.

The period of this dream Chaucer has assigned to the tenth of December; and he invokes the God of Sleep to assist him to tell his dream aright. This introductory portion of the work concludes with a prayer that every favourable event may attend upon those of his readers,

That taketh well, and scorneth nought,

Ne it misdemen in ^dher thought;

ver. 91.

while on the contrary the author wishes to them who shall misdeem of his production, that every harm they dream of by night or by day may overtake them, “with soche conclusion” as Croesus king of Lydia experienced, who (according to Chaucer) perished on a gibbet, in conformity to a vision

Chaucer's
sensitivity
to criti-
cism.

^c Dreamed.

^d their.

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which had predicted to him that such should be his fate. It is not probable that Chaucer would have stained his page with what he truly calls so ° uncharitable a wish, if his productions had not been exposed to censure and criticism, and if he had not been unduly sensible to what carpers and cavillers alleged against them. It is a matter of some curiosity for us to figure to ourselves the sort of animadversions and mockeries with which the *beaux esprits* of the fourteenth century affected to amuse and instruct their gaping audiences ; and we are bound to recollect that, though reviewers and journalists are the spawn of a more recent period, yet Homer had his Zoilus, Virgil his Bavius, and Chaucer his nameless adversary, whose censures, as we are taught on this occasion, he could not hear without some diminution of his Christian charity.

Book I.

The first book of the House of Fame entirely consists of a description of an imaginary

Temple of Venus, made of glass, and adorned on every side with "portraits," the subjects of which are drawn from the *Æneid* of Virgil. Ovid, Claudian and Dante are spoken of in the course of the description, but the honour of having his stories chosen for delineations to adorn the Temple is exclusively reserved for the Mantuan bard. Having viewed these portraits, the author is seized with a desire to examine into the site of this extraordinary edifice, which appeared to be finished in a very exquisite style, but in which he perceived no vestige of any living inhabitant.

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Temple of
Venus.

adorned
with
paintings
from the
Æneid.

When I out of the doré cam,
I faste abouten me behelde:
Then sawe I but a largé felde,
As farre as ever I might se,
Withouten toun, or house, or tre,
Or bushe, or grasse, or ^fered lande;
For all the felde was but of sande,

^f eared, arable.

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As smal as men maye se at eye
In thè desertés of Lybye;
Ne ferther no maner creture,
That is yformed by nature,
Ne sawe I me to ^s rede or wisse.

ver. 480.

Astonished at this uninterrupted and extensive solitude, Chaucer exclaims,

O Christ, thought I, that art in blisse,
From fanton and illusion
Me save! and with devocyon
Mine eyén to the heven I caste.

ver. 492.

In this attitude he discovers an eagle of colossal size, soaring "fast by the sun."

It was of golde, and shone so bright,
That never sawe men soche a sight;
^h But yf the heven had ywonne
Al newe of God another sonne,

^s counsel or instruct.

^h But yf, Unless.

So shone the egles fethers bright :
And somewhat downwarde gan it light.

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ver. 503.

This extraordinary creature in his flight
discovers Chaucer ; and, immediately pounc-
ing upon him, bears him away in his talons,
and carries him along through the regions
of the air. The poet is at first stupified with
terror ; but, being encouraged by his con-
ductor, who addresses him with articulate
sounds,

Book II.

Journey of
Chaucer
to the
House of
Fame.

Right in the samé voice and ⁱ steven
That useth one that I can ^k neven,
For it ⁱ was godely saide to me
So as it ever wonte to be,

ver. 53.

he begins to consider with himself, whether
it were Jupiter's intention, whose messenger
the eagle is of course supposed to be, to
make him a star, or to remove him, as

ⁱ speech.

^k name.

ⁱ addressed to me kindly.

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XXXVII.

Ganymede and Romulus were removed, from earth, and introduce him into the convocation of the Gods. The eagle however, who understands his thoughts, tells him that he is commissioned with no such purpose, though his object is friendly; but that Jupiter, having taken into consideration the constancy of his services to Cupid and Venus

To maken bokes, songes and ditees,
ver. 114.

His prin-
ciples of
philoso-
phy.

and the little extent of his knowledge respecting men and their affairs, had determined to reward his virtue, and enlighten his understanding, by permitting him to visit the House of Fame. The eagle then enters into a philosophical disquisition, intended to instruct Chaucer in the principle to which the House of Fame is indebted for its existence. He tells the poet, that every thing in nature tends to its stead or place, where it may best be preserved, and obtain the most prosperous and suitable being; as stones tend to the earth, as rivers to the sea, as fishes have their healthful condition in the water,

and trees strike out and spread their roots CHAP.
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beneath the ground. So sound, adds he, naturally diffuses itself, and mounts. To render this more obvious to the poet's apprehension, his guide makes use of the simile of the pebble in the lake, which produces a larger and a larger circle, till the last reaches on every side the confining shores; nor does the commotion which is generated rest only upon the surface, but the water is equally moved to its lowest bed, though we do not see it, in like manner as sound is propagated in every direction. Nor is this all:

that same kindly stede ywis
That every thinge enclin'd to is,
Yhath also his ^m kyndelyche stede;

ver. 319.

and in this manner every sound that ascends into the air, has a further tendency, when mounted, to repair to the House of Fame,

^m kindly.

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which is seated equally distant from the
heaven, the earth and sea.

He sees in
his flight
the earth,

While the eagle is thus engaged in unfolding the principles of nature, he proceeds in his flight. Chaucer beholds from on high the fields, the plains and the mountains, the forests and some of their more terrible inhabitants, the giant-trees the fathers of the wood, the cities, the rivers, and the ships sailing on the bosom of the ocean. He afterward passes through the region of meteors, amidst

the meteors,

Cloudés, mistés and tempestés,
Snowés and hailes and raines and windes,
And the engendringe in " her kindes.

ver. 458.

and the
constel-
lations.

At length he arrives at the monsters of the celestial sphere and of the zodiac. The hint of this part of Chaucer's description is taken from the journey of Phaeton in the Metamorphoses. He ascends higher than Alex-

" their.

ander or Scipio had ever done in their dreams, or Icarus in fable. In fine he reaches the spot toward which his journey was directed, and is informed by his conductor, in answer to his enquiries, that in all this house which is before him there does not exist one living being; but that it is peopled with shadows, since every speech that arrives there, has no sooner come, than it assumes the shape, and appears in the exact likeness, of the person who spoke it,

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His arrival.

Be he clothed in red or blake,

° Wher man or woman, he or she.

ver. 570.

The poet and his conductor now separate; and Chaucer advances toward the castle or palace from which his production derives its name. It is placed upon a lofty rock, which he climbs with much difficulty. The surface of the rock shines more clear than polished glass, and the traveller is for some time in

Book III.

Castle of
Fame
erected
upon a
rock of
ice.

° Whether.

CHAP.
XXXVII.

doubt as to the species of matter of which the rock is composed. He finds however at last, that it is

A roche of yse, and not of stele,

ver. 40.

and expresses his surprise at discovering so splendid an edifice placed upon so frail a foundation. The rock is engraved on all sides with the names of persons who at different periods had enjoyed a high reputation; but in most parts the surface is thawed, and the names are difficult to read, one or more letters having disappeared from each. On one side however, where the rock is sheltered by the shadow of the castle, the writing is

As freshe, as men had written ^phem there

The self daie, or that verry houre,

That I on hem began to ^a poure.

ver. 66

^p them : the names.

^a pore.

As soon as Chaucer had reached the castle, CHAP.
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he discovers that it is constructed of one
perfect beryl, "withouten peces or joyn-
ynges." The style of building is magnificent Outside of
the castle.
and full of ornament,

As barbicans and pinnacles,
Imag'ries and tabernacles,

ver. 99.

together with windows as multitudinous as
flakes in a snow-storm. In each of the pin-
nacles are niches, where stand minstrels, re-
laters of gestic, trumpeters and professors of
martial music,

And all that longeth unto fame;

ver. 110.

as well as jogelours, magicians, tragetours,
sorceresses and witches, and all such persons
as by supernatural or necromantic art secure
to themselves an ignominious notoriety.

All this is on the outside of the castle.
Chaucer, after having surveyed the building,
enters at the gate; and, as he is entering,

Its internal
architect-
ure and
appear-
ance.

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meets a multitude of heralds and pursuivants issuing forth, busily engaged in proclaiming the praises of the Goddess, and of her rich and opulent suitors. The description of the divinity of the place, who is seated above a dais, upon an imperial chair carved of dazzling carbuncle, is taken from Virgil and Ovid. She is full of eyes, of ears and of tongues; she has wings on her feet; and, though at first she seems only a cubit in height, she presently after appears with her feet touching the earth, and her head among the stars.

But, Lord! the ^sperrie' and the richesse
I sawe sitting on the Goddesse;
And the hevénly melodie
Of songés full of armonie
I herde about her trone ^tisong,
That all the palais wall ^uyrong!
So songe the mightie musé, she
That cleped is Caliope,

^r An elevated floor, usually placed at the upper end of an apartment of state. See Vol. I, Chap. VIII, p. 253.

^s precious stones. ^t sung. ^u rung.

And her seven ^xsusterné eke,
 That in ^yher faces semen meke,
 And evermore eternally
 Thei song of Fame.

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ver. 303.

From the dais, upon which the Goddess is seated, to the door, there is a numerous range of pillars of different kinds of metals, and each of these pillars is surmounted by the images of various historians and writers of gests, and adventures. There is some obscurity in this part of the poem to the reader who should endeavour to draw out to his fancy the objects described. The hall itself has the same faculty as the deity who inhabits it, being by degrees enlarged to a thousand times the dimensions that it occupied when Chaucer first surveyed it. Of one of the pillars, the author expressly remarks, and by parity of reason it would seem that this observation might be extended to the rest, that

Worthies
 whose
 images
 occupy
 the cas-
 tle.

^x sisters.

^y their.

CHAP. it was as "hie as he might se." Fame
 XXXVII. herself sustains upon her shoulders

Bothé the armés and the name
 Of ^z tho that hadden largé fame ;

ver. 321.

such as Alexander and Hercules. This seems to mean that her robe was adorned with their name and blazonry. Many of the pillars sustain several figures each: of course the figures must be supposed to be small, and, where the capital is as "hie as he might se," the groups would be barely discernible. The same expression is again applied to the historians as had before been applied to the Goddess, that they bear upon their shoulders the fame of the countries whose annals they recorded ; and this, if it was attended with any definite idea in the poet's mind, must of course be interpreted to mean that they had garments in like manner embroidered

^z those.

with names and blazonry. Upon the first CHAP.
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pillar are placed eight historians of the Jews ;
but one only of these, Josephus, has a name
in Chaucer. The second supports the single
figure of Statius, the preserver of the fame
of Thebes. The third is surmounted by
six figures, each “ busie for to bere up
Troye :” these are Homer, Dares, Titus
[Dictys]^a, Lollius^b, Guido dalla Colonna
and Geoffrey of Monmouth. The next two
pillars sustain the single figures of Virgil and
Ovid. The sixth supports Lucan, and

all these clerkes,

That write of Romés mightie werkes :

ver. 413.

^a Warton, on what authority I know not, has changed this name into Livy. Tyrwhit writes it Ditus : See his Glossary.

^b Considering that the stories of Troilus and Creseide, and of Palamon and Arcite, were both translated by Boccaccio and by Chaucer ; that the original author of the latter is wholly unknown ; that they were the work of the same age ; and that Lollius is placed so familiarly by Chaucer upon a footing with the greatest writers ; it is not very improbable that they were both the production of this author, and that

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and the seventh Claudian. Warton * sup-
poses that a species of censure is designed in
placing Lucan among the Roman historians,
according to the decision of Quintilian, that
he is *oratoribus magis quam poetis annume-
randus*. But this is without foundation. In
the times in which Chaucer lived, every
relater of ^dgests was looked to rather for
facts than fiction, and considered as a re-
porter of valuable information, before he was
rated by his merits as a poet. Beside these
seven pillars in the House of Fame, there were
innumerable others ; so that

The hall was allé full iwis
Of hem that written old ^djestés,
As ben on treés rokes nestés :

ver. 424.

and Chaucer seems to decline entering into
further particulars, rather from the inex-

Chaucer translated the one and the other from the Latin in
which he had composed them.

* Vol. I, Sect. xiv.

^d *Gesta*, memorable actions.

haustibleness of the subject, than from a con-
 ception that those whom he had named are
 of a class more worthy than those he passes in
 general terms.

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Having described the structure of the castle, and whatever it contains of inanimate, we come next to the suitors who address themselves to the Goddess, and intreat to obtain of her a boon. In this part of the work Chaucer has displayed considerable humour. Fame is ingeniously feigned by him to be the sister of Fortune, and not less capricious in her frowns and her smiles; the poet hereby insinuating that the firm and noble mind will look with no less indifference upon the decrees of the one than upon those of the other.

Petitioners
in the
House of
Fame.

Their va-
rying
success.

And some of hem she graunted sone,
 And some she ^ewarned well and faire,
 And some she graunted the contraire
 Of ^fher askyng all utterlie:
 But this I say you truélie,

^e refused with smooth and gentle speech. ^f their.

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What that ^s her grace was I ^h ne wist ;
 For of these folke full well I wist,
 Thei had gode fame ⁱ eche deserved
 Although thei were diversely served.

ver. 448.

Æolus and
 his trum-
 pets.

When the Goddess begins to attend to the
 petitions submitted to her, she dispatches a
 messenger to summon to her aid Æolus God
 of the Winds, who immediately presents
 himself with his two trumpets, of “ clere
 laude” and of “ sclaunder ;” the former
 made of gold,

And certes all the breth, that went
 Out of this trumpés mouthé, smelde
 As men a pot full of baume helde
 Emong a basket full of roses ;

ver. 594.

the other made of brass, its colour the deepest
 black, and issuing from its mouth, when
 blown upon, a smoke

^s her grace seems here to denote her rule of decision.

^h could not divine.

ⁱ forte alike.

Blacke, blue and grenishe, swartishe, rede,
And it stanke as the pitte of hell.

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ver. 557.

The first company of petitioners implore to obtain the fame which they have deserved by their worthy deeds, but the Goddess refuses to employ Æolus respecting them, and dismisses them without a decision. The second company prefer a similar petition, but with a more unfortunate issue.

And thou, Dan Æolus, quod she,
Take forthe thy trompe anone, let se,
That is icleped Sclaunder light,
And blowe ^k her loos, that every wight
Speke of hem harme and shreuédnesse
In stede of gode and worthinesse,
For thou shalt trumpe all the contraire
Of that thei have doen well and faire.

ver. 533.

The third company, whose case is the same, obtain a praise beyond their deserts. The fourth band of suitors,

^k her loos ; their fame.

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But certaine thei were ^l wonder fewe,
 — said, Certes, ladie bright,
 We have doen well with all our might,
 But we ne ^m kepe to haven fame,
ⁿ Hideth our workés and our name.

ver. 601.

The capricious deity yields to their demand ; but, another set preferring the same request, she reproaches them with indignation for the contempt with which they regard her, and orders their worth to be instantly proclaimed so loud, that all the world may resound with it. The two following companies consist of empty coxcombs who desire to have a lying reputation of women's favours ; and, as in the preceding instance, the first are successful, and the second, being refused, are given up to universal mockery and contempt. Two more bands of petitioners close the procession : these are wicked men : the former intreat to be renowned for all the virtues

^l wondrous.

^m desire.

ⁿ Hide, imperative.

which they have not, and are refused; the latter pray to be universally spoken of for their dishonest and atrocious acts, and obtain their request: the spokesman of this band is Erostratus, who set fire to the temple of Diana at Ephesus [Chaucer says, by mistake, of Isis at Athens], that by so doing he might live to eternal abhorrence, to baffle which monstrous desire the magistrates of the city passed a law, declaring it criminal to mention his name.

Chaucer having witnessed this scene, a stranger accosts him, enquiring what was his errand thither, and whether he also had come in pursuit of reputation.

Chaucer's
professed
estima-
tion of
fame.

Nay, ° for sothe, frende, quod I,
I come nat hither, ° graunt mercy,
For no soche causé, by my hed;
Sufficeth me, ° as I were ded,
That no wight have my name in honde:
I wot my selfe best howe I ° stonde:

° forsooth.

° *grand' merci*, great thanks.

° when I am dead.

° stand.

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For what I ^sdrie, or what I thinke,
 I wol my selfen al it drinke,
 Certainly for the more parte,
 'As ferforth as I can mine arte.

ver. 783.

House of
Tydinges.

Chaucer proceeds to complain to the stranger that he is disappointed; that he knew, before he came hither, that many men in many ways are desirous of fame; but that he had been led to expect to learn some new things, tidings (he knew not what)

Of love, or of soche thinges glade.

ver. 799.

On this intimation, the stranger conducts him out of the castle, to the House of Tydinges. This house is constructed entirely of twigs of various colours, and is shaped like a cage. It appears to be circular, and the diameter is sixty miles in length. The avenues to it are as numerous as leaves on trees, and the roof

^s suffer.

^t As far as I know my plan of life.

is pierced with a thousand holes to let the sounds escape. It has besides the quality of CHAP.
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whirling about with a restless motion as swift as thought, so that Chaucer is at a loss how to effect his entrance. In this dilemma, he is unexpectedly relieved by his conductor the eagle, who once again takes him up in his talons, and carries him through a window into the hall. This apartment Chaucer finds so crowded that he has scarcely room to stand; and all the persons within are busily employed in repeating to each other tidings of war and peace, accord and strife, rest and travail, life and death, plenty and famine, prosperity and misfortune, fair weather and tempest, of marriages,

Of gode and of misse government,
Of fire, and divers accident,

ver. 885.

eked out with inventions and prophecies, uttered sometimes in whisper and sometimes aloud, and confirmed with oaths. No sooner

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has one heard a thing, than he is eager to communicate it to another, “^u Or it a forlonge way was olde ;” and, every time it is repeated, something is added to the tale of the former relater. When any story is grown to a certain size, it instantly hastens to the world below ; and Chaucer sometimes sees a truth and a lie struggling with each other for a passage, and no otherwise able to escape, than by forming an agreement, and promising that they will constantly travel together. From the House of Tydinges the different stories repair to the presence of Fame, who gives them names, and assigns them at pleasure a durable or a transitory existence. The frequenters of the House of Tydinges are shipmen, pilgrims, ^x pardoners, couriers and messengers, with boxes full of lies. Chaucer wanders up and down to amuse himself, and hears a tiding

^u Ere.

^x A sort of travelling chapmen, who dealt in pardons, licences and indulgences from the pope.

of some countre,
 That shall not nowe be tolde for me,
 For it no nede is—redyly
 Folke can y ysinge it bet than I;
^z For al mote out or late or rathe,
 Allé the shevés in the lathe.

ver. 1045.

At length he observes every one running to a particular corner of the hall, shoving and elbowing each other, and even climbing upon each other's shoulders: this corner was appropriated to tidings of love.

Before Chaucer however has mixed in the crowd, his eye is suddenly caught with the figure of a man, which he feels unable to describe; and therefore contents himself with informing us, that his appearance was such as implied great dignity and authority. At sight of him the poet awakes from his dream. By this conclusion to his performance, he

^y relate it better.

^z For every thing must come to light late or early, as the barn (*lathe*) is gradually emptied of its sheaves.

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seems to intend an implied censure of himself, for writing, at his age, and with his serious occupations, upon so slight a subject, and wandering among the unsubstantial forms of allegory.

Chaucer's
character
of himself.

In the second book of the poem Chaucer enters into the developement, as he seems willingly to have done on other occasions, of certain features of his own character. The eagle tells him,

not onely fro ferre countre
No tidingés comen to the,
Not of thy very neighbourés
That dwellen almost at thy dorés
Thou herest neither that ne this;
For, when thy labour al done is,
And hast *made al thy reckeninges*,
In stede of reste and of newe thinges,
Thou goest home to thy house anone,
And al so dombe as any stone
Thou sittest at another boke,
Tyl fully ^a dased is thy loke,

^a dimmed.

And livest thus as an hermite ;
Although thine abstinence is lite.

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Book II, ver. 139.

In this passage we have two principal features of Chaucer's character : his insatiable love of study ; and, in the last line, his propensity to a free and generous style of living.

Elsewhere he alludes to some calamity with which he was at this time oppressed. The eagle observes to him,

Writes
under
some op-
pression
of mind.

Jovés of his grace,
As I have said, wil ^b the solace
Finally with these ^c ilké thinges,
^d Uncouth sightés and tidinges,
To passe away thine hevinesse ;
Soche ^e routhe hath he of thy distresse,
That thou suffred'st debonairly,
And ^f wost thy selven utterly
Whole desperate of allé blisse,
Sithe that fortune hath made ^g amisse

^b thee.

^c same.

^d Unknown, strange.

^e pity.

^f believedst.

^g injuriously.

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has one heard a thing, than he is eager to communicate it to another, “^u Or it a forlonge way was olde ;” and, every time it is repeated, something is added to the tale of the former relater. When any story is grown to a certain size, it instantly hastens to the world below ; and Chaucer sometimes sees a truth and a lie struggling with each other for a passage, and no otherwise able to escape, than by forming an agreement, and promising that they will constantly travel together. From the House of Tydinges the different stories repair to the presence of Fame, who gives them names, and assigns them at pleasure a durable or a transitory existence. The frequenters of the House of Tydinges are shipmen, pilgrims, ^{*} pardoners, couriers and messengers, with boxes full of lies. Chaucer wanders up and down to amuse himself, and hears a tiding

^u Ere.

^{*} A sort of travelling chapmen, who dealt in pardons, licences and indulgences from the pope.

of some countre,
 That shall not nowe be tolde for me,
 For it no nede is—redyly
 Folke can ^y ysinge it bet than I;
^z For al mote out or late or rathe,
 Allé the shevés in the lathe.

ver. 1045.

At length he observes every one running to a particular corner of the hall, shoving and elbowing each other, and even climbing upon each other's shoulders: this corner was appropriated to tidings of love.

Before Chaucer however has mixed in the crowd, his eye is suddenly caught with the figure of a man, which he feels unable to describe; and therefore contents himself with informing us, that his appearance was such as implied great dignity and authority. At sight of him the poet awakes from his dream. By this conclusion to his performance, he

^y relate it better.

^z For every thing must come to light late or early, as the barn (*lathe*) is gradually emptied of its sheaves.

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seems to intend an implied censure of himself, for writing, at his age, and with his serious occupations, upon so slight a subject, and wandering among the unsubstantial forms of allegory.

Chaucer's
character
of himself.

In the second book of the poem Chaucer enters into the developement, as he seems willingly to have done on other occasions, of certain features of his own character. The eagle tells him,

not onely fro ferre countre
No tidingés comen to the,
Not of thy very neighbourés
That dwellen almost at thy dorés
Thou herest neither that ne this;
For, when thy labour al done is,
And hast *made al thy reckeninges*,
In stede of reste and of newe thinges,
Thou goest home to thy house anone,
And al so dombe as any stone
Thou sittest at another boke,
Tyl fully ^a dased is thy loke,

^a dimmed.

And livest thus as an hermite ;
 Although thine abstinence is lite.

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Book II, ver. 139.

In this passage we have two principal features of Chaucer's character : his insatiable love of study ; and, in the last line, his propensity to a free and generous style of living.

Elsewhere he alludes to some calamity with which he was at this time oppressed. The eagle observes to him,

Writes
 under
 some op-
 pression
 of mind.

Jovés of his grace,
 As I have said, wil ^b the solace
 Finally with these ^c ilké thinges,
^d Uncouth sightés and tidinges,
 To passe away thine hevinesse ;
 Soche ^e routhe hath he of thy distresse,
 That thou suffred'st debonairly,
 And ^f wost thy selven utterly
 Whole desperate of allé blisse,
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^b thee.

^c same.

^d Unknown, strange.

^e pity.

^f believedst.

^g injuriously.

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The ^hsote of al thine hertés rest
Languishé, and eke in point to ⁱbrest.

Book III, ver. 917.

This seems to allude to the dangerous illness of some person very dear to Chaucer, his wife or his child; and, if that be the true construction, affords additional evidence of the tenderness of his disposition.

Period at
which the
House of
Fame was
produced.

In other parts of the poem Chaucer speaks of himself, as he had done in his earlier works, as a stranger to the passion of love. It is that he may become more intimately acquainted with the incidents of this passion, that Jove sends him upon this extraordinary voyage.

For that thou haste, so truély,
So long, served ^kententifly
His blindé nephewe Cupido,
And fairé quene Venus also,
Withouten ⁱguerdon ever yet,
And ^mnathéles hast set thy wit,

^h sweet.

ⁱ burst, die.

^k earnestly.

ⁱ reward.

^m nevertheless.

Although in thy hed ful ⁿ lite is,
 To maken bokes, songes and ditees,
 ——— in reverence
 Of Love; ———

And evermore of Love enditest,
 In honour of him and praisinges,
 And ^o in his folkés fortheringes,
 And in ^p her mater al devisest,
 And not him ne his folke despisest,
^a Although thou maist go in the daunce
 Of hem, that him lyst not avaunce :

.
 Wherefore, as Jove considereth this,
 And ^r als, beausire, of other thinges,
 That is, that thou haste no tidinges
 Of Lovés folke, ———

Book II, ver. 107.

From this, and other passages of the same nature, we might infer that this was one of Chaucer's juvenile productions, were it not that in the verses previously quoted he

ⁿ little. ^o for the furthering of his votaries. ^p their.

^a Although thou mightest number thyself in the party of them, by whom Cupid is despised.

^r also, good sir.

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alludes to his arithmetical occupation, and elsewhere expressly observes of himself, "For I am olde^s." Chaucer also speaks of himself as poor^t, but the turn of the passage in which this insinuation occurs is so playful, that it may well be doubted whether the penury alluded to is any thing more than that of which men in easy, sometimes in opulent, circumstances allow themselves to complain.

The subject taken from some writer of the middle ages.

Mr. Warton has already remarked upon this poem, that the writer is once addressed by the eagle under the name of Geoffrey^u, and twice under that of Peter^x; a circumstance strongly presumptive of the fact, that the House of Fame is in some degree a translation, and at the same time that it is less purely so than the Romaunt of the Rose, as might indeed well be inferred from some of the passages last extracted. There is however no reason to imagine, as Warton does, that it is taken from a Provençal poem.

^s Book II, ver. 487.

^t Book III, ver. 259.

^u Book II, ver. 221.

^x Book II, ver. 526; Book III, ver. 909.

This commendation of the Provençals has perhaps been partly founded upon the superior happiness of their climate, and partly upon the applauses with which they are occasionally mentioned by Petrarca and Dante. The idea of their preeminent merit has been abundantly refuted by more recent enquiries. Add to which, whatever excellence antiquarian visionaries have sometimes attributed to them, we have no reason to believe that Chaucer was even acquainted with their language.

It seems indeed that it may safely be pronounced of this poem, that it has much in it of Chaucer. Till the original from which he borrowed the idea shall be discovered, it will be impossible to determine how much of the invention existed before, and how much was the growth of the mind of Chaucer. Perhaps he did in this case much as Shakespear has done, when, upon the tragedies of a Lear and a King John, vapid and spiritless in the extreme, which he found already written, he erected those noble flights of genius, which render his plays so called, each in its re-

Its character.

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pective degree, the wonders of the world.

The rock of ice upon which the castle is built, the philosophy of sound, the two trumpets of Æolus, the whirling motion of the House of Tydinges, and many other parts of the poem, are in the finest style of allegorical delineation. We may add, they are precisely in the style of Chaucer. They have that fresh and wholesome hue, and that muscular and elastic character, which are peculiarly the inheritance of great minds. No elaborateness, no artifice, no affectation. It is the signature of Chaucer's imagination, that he dwells in generals, and by a single happy trait sets fire to his reader's fancy, and conjures up in him the feeling and state of mind which would have been produced, had the reader been present to the objects of which his author treats. Spenser on the other hand, whom among the ancient ornaments of our country we cannot help always recollecting as the great counterpart of Chaucer, deals in minute and microscopic painting, and so finishes his representations, that the reader has nothing further to require,

at the same time that he rather sees the object, than feels the emotion which the object should produce. It would be a great mistake, to suppose that there is more of imagination in this, than in the grander and more audacious strokes of our elder poet.

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Pope's performance entitled the Temple of Fame, in spite of his affected intimation to his readers, that, though "the design is in a manner entirely altered, and the descriptions and most of the particular thoughts his own, yet he could not suffer it to be printed without acknowledging" his obligation to Chaucer, may afford, to a person unfamiliarised with the phraseology of the elder poet, a tolerably exact idea of the third book of the House of Fame, though stripped of much of the wild and impressive boldness of our venerable bard.

Pope's
Temple
of Fame.

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WICLIFFE'S EMBASSY CONCLUDED.—HIS TENETS.
RESPECTING DOCTRINE AND DISCIPLINE.—VIEWS
OF JOHN OF GAUNT IN HIS PATRONAGE OF
WICLIFFE.—CHAUCER OBTAINS THE WARDSHIP
OF EDMUND STAPELGATE.

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1374.

WICLIFFE, in his appointment of negotiator with the papal commissioners at Bruges, appears to have resided in that city occasionally at least for two years, from August 1374 to about August of the year 1376^a. This must have been an important era in the life of our venerable reformer. He is said by his biographer^a to have gained new lights as to the policy and maxims of the church of Rome, from his near intercourse with the

^a Lewis, Chap. III.

envoys of Gregory XI; the bishop of Pampeluna, and the bishop of Senigaglia. But, during the period in which Wicliffe took up his abode in Bruges, this city further became the resort of some of the most distinguished characters in Europe. It was fixed upon for the scene of negotiation respecting the jarring interests of France and England; and, in the beginning of the year, the king of Castille arrived there as plenipotentiary from Edward III, having for his colleagues in this commission Simon Sudbury bishop of London, William earl of Salisbury son to the celebrated earl and countess of Salisbury who have repeatedly been mentioned, and others. The ambassadors on the part of France were the dukes of Anjou and Burgundy, brothers to Charles V; and the pope had, for his representatives, and mediators between the two contending powers, the archbishop of Ravenna in Italy, and the bishop of Carpentras in the territory of Avignon^b.

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Resort of
eminent
characters
to the city
of Bruges.

^b Rymer, Tom. VII, 49 Edv. 2, Feb. 20 & Jun. 27.

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WICLIFFE'S EMBASSY CONCLUDED.—HIS TENETS.
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What were Wicliffe's qualifications as a man of business and of the world previously to this commission, we cannot exactly decide. But an individual of talents infinitely inferior to his must have learned much, in being a witness of what was passing at Bruges during his residence in that place. We may be certain that Wicliffe did not fail to speculate deeply, and draw many profound reflections from what he saw. The public character in which he had come to Bruges gave him familiar access to the exalted personages who resorted thither ; and, among the representatives of the three greatest powers then existing in the world, he studied the mysteries of church and state after a very different manner from that which could have been supplied to him by books, or by his solitary rambles and meditations on the banks of the Isis.

Papal bulls
in behalf
of the
church
and clergy
of Eng-
land.

It is difficult exactly to trace the progress of the ecclesiastical negotiations at Bruges. There are six bulls of Gregory XI. of the date of September 1375, purporting to adjust, under so many different heads, the questions

which had been agitated respecting the church and clergy of England^c; and it is natural to regard these edicts in some manner as the result of the consultations held at that place. The object of them is to establish those persons in their benefices in England who were in actual possession, any provisions or appointments of the sovereign pontiff notwithstanding; to annul those reservations of Urban V. which, having forbidden the ordinary authorities in England to nominate to vacant benefices and preferments, had never been so acted upon as for the court of Rome to have used the power reserved; to confirm those beneficed clergy in England whose titles the late pope had questioned, and remit to them the first-fruits which he had demanded; and to permit a jury of neighbours on the spot, to assess the requisite sums upon the revenues of those livings in England which were held by cardinals, in cases where the churches or other eccle-

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^c Rymer, 49 Edv. 3, Sep. 1.

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siastical buildings were falling to decay, and stood in need of being repaired.

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Close of
the nego-
tiation.

This however was by no means the close of the ecclesiastical negotiation at Bruges. It appears from the Parliament Rolls of the years 1376 and 1377, that at the former of these periods the questions between the king and the pope were still under discussion, and that at the latter the pope had promised redress^d. The conclusion of the affair is said to have been a mutual compromise, that the pope should employ no more reservations, and that the king should forbear from an appointment to benefices indiscriminately of his own mere authority^e, as he had sometimes done in imitation perhaps of the papal usurpations in the same point.

Historians have in general agreed to represent the conclusion of the ecclesiastical congress at Bruges as unsatisfactory; and have even undertaken to account for this,

^d Cotton, 50 & 51 Edv. 3.

^e Walsingham, A. D. 1374. Cotton, 1 Ric. 2.

by supposing that bishop Gilbert, the first person in the king's commission, was in some way bought off by the pope. They observe that he was translated to the see of Hereford by a papal bull, September 12 in this year, and afterward by the same authority to the bishopric of St. Davids in 1389^f. Whatever error might be committed in the negotiation, we may be certain that no part of it was imputed to Wicliffe. It was soon after his return that he is supposed to have received the valuable living of Lutterworth in the county of Leicester from the bounty of his friend, the king of Castille^f.

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To this date it has been usual to refer the lectures and discourses of Wicliffe in which he combated and exposed the whole system of the Romish hierarchy. The date is certainly, in some respects at least, too late. The great ascendancy which we shall perceive his opinions to have gained in the parliament of the following year, forbids us

Progress of
the opi-
nions of
Wicliffe.

^f Lewis, Chap. III.

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to believe that their first disclosure was delayed so long. A critical study of his works yet remaining, chiefly in manuscript, would perhaps enable the ecclesiastical historian to determine what part of his warfare against court of Rome had preceded his official concern in the congress at Bruges, and by how long a time, and what part of it was subsequent to that event.

Champions
of the
reform of
the church
previously
to this
period.

Various causes have already led us into a discussion of the attacks made upon the policy of Rome by St. Amour, Fitzralph archbishop of Armagh, and Grossteste, who may be considered as the precursors of Wicliffe. Their onsets were by no means deficient in courage and spirit, but they were chiefly confined to two points^s:—the institution and conduct of the orders of mendicants; and the incroachments of the pope, by which he often superseded the ecclesiastical constitution of each particular country, and disposed of benefices and dignities throughout Christendom at his

^s See Vol. I, Chap. X: Vol. II, Chap. XXV, and XXXII.

pleasure. In the commencement of his public life, and for several following years, Wicliffe had merely trod in their steps, and discoursed upon their topics.

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Previously to Wicliffe, the satirists and poets had also descanted with great freedom upon the corrupt views and scandalous lives of the Romish clergy. This was a favourite theme of the tale-writers of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. We have had a specimen of the style in which the poets of these ages treated ecclesiastical subjects, in our review of the Romance of the Rose ; and few readers are ignorant of the ridicule with which the vices of the monks and friars are exposed by Boccaccio in the Decamerone. The dispute of the Guelphs and Ghibbelines concerning the respective limits of civil and ecclesiastical authority, had led men in a certain degree to hold up the torch of truth to the usurpations of the church ; and this dispute has been consecrated to immortality by the sublime pen of Dante.

Satires
against its
abuses.

But the court of Rome was not speedily alarmed at these freedoms. She reposed with

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a generous confidence upon the folly and blindness of mankind. Disquisitions, arguments, satires and sonnets, seem to the uninstructed eye things of so airy and impotent a nature, that experience alone leads to their being regarded with suspicion. Men who wield the formidable sanctions which civil or ecclesiastical governments engender, are always inclined to view the meagre and solitary student who has no engine but his pen, with an eye of contempt.

Heretics of
the twelfth
and thirteenth
centuries.

The Wal-
denses.

There was however a race of men to whom the court of Rome was by no means inclined to extend the same toleration which she granted to the solemn doctor and the airy satirist: these were the heretics of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. The most memorable families of this tribe were the Waldenses and the Albigenses. The former appear to have been merely melancholy enthusiasts. Endeavouring to reduce Christianity to its original standard, they insisted that the rich among them should sell all they had and divide with the poor, and required their clergy to be illiterate, poor and destitute, like

the fishermen who first taught the religion of Jesus. They were distinguished by the wretchedness of their apparel, an austere countenance and an emaciated frame; and, if any were allowed to bear the name of their sect without submitting to these rigours, they served to swell the numbers of the party, but were admitted only into its subordinate and less reputable classes^b. The Albigenses, with the same exterior features of character, were materially distinguished from the Waldenses by the articles of their creed. They derived their descent from the Gnostics of the primitive ages of Christianity. They held that the material world was the work of an inferior divinity, the whole of whose proceedings were in opposition to the pure spirit, the elder and supreme God. They maintained that Jesus Christ assumed the similitude alone of a human body, and only seemed to have expired on the cross. From

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The Albi-
genses.

^b Mosheim, *Historia Ecclesiastica*, Cent. XII, Pars II, cap. v, §. 11, 12, 13.

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Sanguinary
persecu-
tions,

their fundamental principle of the stubborn and rebellious qualities of matter, they deduced a multitude of arguments in favour of the maceration of the flesh, and the mortification of the most innocent desires of man¹.

Systems like these, if they had generally prevailed, had a tendency to destroy that literature, refinement and civilisation, which about this time took their rise in modern Europe. There was however little reason to apprehend that they could have so alarming and extensive a diffusion. The court of Rome felt an animosity against these sects, not in proportion to the danger they menaced to the fabric of civil society, but measured by the contrast they afforded to the corruption and degeneracy of the established church. The heretics were not more extravagant in their attempts to introduce a savage and comfortless mode of existence, than the court of Rome was in its pride, arrogance, luxuriousness

¹ Ditto, Cent. XIII, Pars II, cap. v, §. 3—8. Gibbon, Chap. LIV.

and venality. The austerities too of the heretics, however ridiculous they may be in our eyes, were exactly fitted to seize the imagination, and procure the applause, of the men of their own times. Accordingly, the progress of their tenets was rapid, and nobles and princes were forward to declare themselves their abettors. On the other hand, the hostility of the Roman pontiff was expressed in no equivocal language or temporising proceedings. His measure was a crusade; and his machine the inquisition, which was expressly invented for this occasion. So bloody a war as that carried on by Simon de Montfort at the head of the crusaders of Languedoc, and St. Dominic who led the tribunals for the detection of heretical pravity, is scarcely elsewhere to be found in the history of the world.

Such was the state of actual power and of heretical innovation in the church of Rome, previously to the enterprises of Wicliffe. This celebrated reformer appears deeply to have meditated his plan, before he commenced his career. He attacked no mere

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System of
Wicliffe.

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outposts of the church, as had been done by St. Amour, Fitzralph and Grossteste. His conceptions were cast in a very different mould from those of the heretics of the preceding centuries. The extravagances of the Gnostics, the Manicheans, and a hundred other sects into which the church had been rent, were such as to have brought the name of innovation in doctrine into contempt. Had Wicliffe imitated their example, his efforts for reformation would have experienced a fate similar to theirs.

He opposes
the supremacy of
the pope,

All that he taught was bold, manly and strongly conceived, but perfectly simple. He opposed the supremacy of the pope. He saw no authority in reason or in Scripture, by which the referring the whole sovereign power over the church of Christ to one centre, the bishop and court of Rome, could be vindicated. He exposed in glowing colours the infinite multitude of usurpations which had grown out of this spurious principle. Penances, pardons, licences to infringe a positive institution, masses for the dead, and works of supererogation constituting a

penances,
pardons,
indulgences,
and
prayers
for the
dead.

bank of merit to be arbitrarily disposed of for the benefit of the living, he held up to that contempt with which, employed as they were for occasions to the vilest abuses, they have been viewed by all sober men from his time to the present. He saw in them a traffic rendering the court of Rome the most venal and unprincipled then existing on the face of the earth, and a means of slavery reducing its votaries to a state of mind the most feeble, pitiable and abject. He did not scruple to denominate this mighty fabric of superstition Antichrist, and to affirm that the pope was that "man of sin" of whom St. Paul and St. John prophesied in the sacred writings. The object toward which his desires were directed was to vindicate every Christian into "the liberty with which Christ had made us free," invigorated by enquiry and instruction, and accustomed to consult only his own judgment and conscience.

The prelacy, such as he saw it in his times, was to Wicliffe another object of animosity and invective. Bishops during the dark ages had been gradually rising into the condition

the pride
and lux-
ury of the
hierar-
chy.

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of temporal princes. They grasped the sword with that hand which should have been devoted to the crosier, and frequently exhibited themselves, cased in steel, in the midst of the field of war. They formed themselves into a close and well compacted incorporation, a principal object of which was to resist the authority of the state, to hurl defiance to legislatures and kings, and to place the spiritual power superior to the resentment and control of the civil. At the same time they were inattentive to the instruction of the people, and too often callous and indifferent to the decorum of their station. Recollecting the base purposes which it served, Wicliffe was an unrelenting enemy to the luxury and ostentation of the heads of the church. The object he had at heart was the establishment of a preaching clergy, not the instruments of a foreign power, not debauched by opulence and state, but who, reviving in their own persons the simplicity and ingenuousness of the apostolic times, should feel no incentive to mislead and trample upon those whom they were bound to cherish, to instruct and reform.

He inveighed against the exemption of the priesthood from secular jurisdiction, and urged the necessity of putting them upon a footing with the rest of the community. He opposed the celibacy of the clergy, as founded in erroneous views of human nature, and as tending to draw them together into a party having no feelings in common with their fellow subjects and fellow citizens.

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and the
celibacy
of the
clergy.

Wicliffe was nevertheless a zealous advocate for the doctrines of predestination and grace, and his creed tended to represent the creator of the world as an arbitrary being, capriciously deciding upon the fates of mankind^k. In the leader of the honourable band of reformers, we must not expect to find a philosopher. If his soul had not been inspired with the fervours of zeal and enthusiasm, he never could have been the founder of a sect, the members of which were indiscriminately taken from every class in the community.

Wicliffe a
predest-
inarian.

^k For a minute account of the tenets of Wicliffe, supported by extracts of his writings, see Lewis, Life of Wicliffe, passim.

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Grandeur
of his
views,

for the im-
prove-
ment of
morality.

But, without regarding Wicliffe as the object of our unmingled admiration, it is easy to perceive that his views were of the grandest sort, and that he was substantially and eminently the benefactor of mankind. He aimed at producing a revolution in the morals of his country and of Europe. For this purpose he invited men to shake off the trammels of implicit faith, and to judge for themselves. He instructed them to look beyond the outside of things. He taught them that they were to be acquitted or condemned, not by the censures, the excommunications and absolutions of another, but by their own character and actions. He pointed his satire against religious arrogance, ostentation and venality. He recommended simplicity of judgment, plainness in conduct, and purity of heart.

and the
emanci-
pation of
the hu-
man un-
derstand-
ing.

His creed was similar to that of Calvin, a gloomy doctrine, equally condemned by the understanding, and revolting to the heart. But he gave a new impulse to the human mind. He called upon his fellow men to reject a faith which had been entailed upon

them for ages. He bid them inspect, examine and enquire. He invited them to apply the touchstone of a severe logic to every doctrine and practice, however sanctioned by length of prescription, which they were required to embrace. He gave them as food for their reflections, not a few abstruse metaphysical subtleties, the amusement of the idle, but a discussion relative to questions of the utmost moment to their prosperity here and their felicity in an invisible world, and calculated to act upon all the passions of the soul. He broke the chains of superstition and pusillanimous terror under which Europe had so long groaned, and bade millions be free.

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Wicliffe was too nearly what has since been understood by the term, a puritan. He did not sufficiently take into consideration some of the fundamental properties of the human mind. He did not enough regard man as the creature of his senses. He was too severely inclined to strip religion of its ornaments. Enthusiasm, founded upon abstractions alone, is a short-lived passion. It

Puritanical
complex-
ion of his
tenets.

CHAP. may be lively and operative in one gener-
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ation, but it will subside into torpor in the next. In the ordinary and transient concerns of human life we rarely feel a strong and permanent attachment but to what we see. In like manner in religion we can never have a system, uniform, genial and nutritive of the purest affections and habits, without the solemnities of worship, the decencies of architecture, the friendly alliance of harmonious sounds, or the fragrance of delicious odours.

Wicliffe's plan of attack upon the established church was however that which was probably best calculated for effect in the times in which he lived. The ideas of men in these times, as of the bulk of mankind in all ages, were gross. If he had endeavoured to ascertain the exact medium between the profuse magnificence of the church as then established, and the extreme of severe simplicity, and had recommended that alone, he would not have been understood. He would not have afforded to the minds of his contemporaries any thing sufficiently palpable

for their grasp, nor have produced that shock and surprise which are necessary as the impulse to a revolution. The awful and apostolic plainness which he exhibited was indispensable to his success.

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Such was the man whose counsels were listened to by the king of Castille, and whose talents and acuteness were employed by him in the most important transactions. Such was the man who divided his favour with Chaucer; and we may reasonably believe, what the historians have concurred to report to us, that there was a considerable degree of friendship and attachment between the divine and the poet¹. It seldom happens that a man of so acute a mind, such a master of the human passions, and so popular and eloquent a declaimer, as Wicliffe, is void of relish for profaner literature, and the sallies of imagination and invention. On the other hand, we may be well assured that Chaucer had that comprehension of sentiment, and exactness

Intimacy
of Wic-
liffe and
Chaucer.

¹ Fox, Speght, Urry, Lewis, &c.

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Religious
purposes
of the king
of Cas-
tille.

of observation, which fitted him properly to estimate the merits of the fervent and austere reformer.

Wicliffe, as has already been observed, was a puritan; but we have no reason to impute that character to the king of Castille. It is not related of him as of some of the most eminent nobles and statesmen in the reign of Elizabeth, that he manifested a passion for long sermons, or invited the Lollard divines to join in pious exercises under his roof. A few years after this, we find him differing with and separating himself from Wicliffe, when the reformer, stimulated by the success of his first experiments, proceeded to a length which his patron deemed impolitic or injurious. The views of Wicliffe were of a spiritual sort; he opposed the established church, not because he had less, but because he had more, of the religious sentiment, than the majority of its stoutest champions. The views of John of Gaunt appear to have been of a political nature. He saw how much the incroachments of the church of Rome had trenched

upon the integrity of the English government, and he deemed it an object worthy of his efforts to repel and put an end to these incroachments. As a patron of the reformation in England, it is natural to compare him with his descendant, Henry VIII, and he will appear to great advantage in the comparison. He did not aim at the indiscriminate ruin of hoary and venerable establishments, nor was he urged by the low promptings of a rapacious temper. He owed nothing, as Henry did, to the spur of a sensual appetite disappointed of its ends, but took up the reformation of the church deliberately, in the commencement of his political life, as one of the means by which most effectually to serve his country. He was no persecutor; he did not fluctuate from side to side, led by the impulse or caprice of the moment. The resemblance is greater and more striking in many respects, of John of Gaunt to Wolsey, the minister of Henry. Like Wolsey, while he effectually wielded the government of his own country, he aspired to a foreign sovereignty; Wolsey to the papacy, John of

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Compared
with
Henry
VIII.with ear-
dinal
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Gaunt to the sovereignty of Spain. Like Wolsey, he was splendid and ostentatious; magnificent in his temper, and tasteful in the bent and character of his mind. Like Wolsey, he sought to be surrounded by servants of a bold, vigorous and active cast of disposition. And like Wolsey, he was anxious to prove himself a patron of literature and science; and posterity are deeply indebted to him for his exertions for that end.

Chaucer
obtains
the ward-
ship of
Edmund Sta-
pel-
gate.

In the course of the year of which we are treating, Chaucer received from the bounty of the crown the wardship of Edmund Stapelgate a minor; that is, the custody of all the estates which devolved to him by the death of his father, together with his *maritagium*, or the fee which a tenant holding immediately from the crown, paid for the royal consent, in case he contracted marriage while a minor^m. This grant was in perfect conformity to the manners of the times. By the feudal institutions, the wardship and mar-

riage of a minor, being a tenant *in capite*, fell to the crown; and it was frequent for the king to bestow them as boons upon such of his courtiers as he principally favoured. We may judge of the importance of the grant in this instance, from the circumstance of Chaucer's ward having been a co-petitioner with the earl Arundel, though an unsuccessful one, for the honour of officiating as butler to the king at the coronation of Richard IIⁿ. It also appears from the same circumstance that the minority could not have been a long one, since we find the ward acting in his own behalf on this occasion, in less than two years after the date of the grant. The heir finally redeemed the rights which had been conferred upon Chaucer for the sum of £. 104, equal in money of the present times to £. 1,872 sterling.

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T A M O
XIXXX

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^a Appendix, No.

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FACTIOUS PROCEEDINGS OF *THE GOOD PARLIAMENT*.—PROMPTED BY WILLIAM OF WYKEHAM.—PROGRESS OF THE SENTIMENTS OF WICLIFFE.—ODIUM EXCITED AGAINST THE KING OF CASTILLE.—DEATH OF THE BLACK PRINCE.

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State of
public
affairs.

THE domestic transactions of the fiftieth year of Edward III. are more extraordinary and worthy of notice than those of any other period of the reign of that prince.

The king of Castille had now been for about ten years the first minister of his father, and had conducted the affairs of his country with little apparent opposition during the whole of that time. He had led the armies of England; he had negotiated for her in her discussions with her great neighbour and rival; and he had meditated profound plans

for her religious emancipation and the improvement of her ecclesiastical constitution. CHAP.
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He had taken into his familiarity the most eminent geniuses the island then had to boast, and had embellished his court with the services of Wicliffe and Chaucer.

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A slight instance of contention had occurred in the government of Edward III. in the year 1371 : but it had been quieted by the removal of William of Wykeham from the office of chancellor ; and John of Gaunt flattered himself that he had succeeded in retaining the good-will of this prelate by his civilities and attentions, after he ceased to be a minister. But in this he was exceedingly deceived. A secret party had been forming for a considerable time against the government, and we shall see reason to believe that Wykeham was the soul of this party. Every thing bore a favourable aspect upon their machinations, and every thing was industriously and ably taken advantage of to the injury of the king of Castille.

Edward III. was now in the sixty-sixth year of his age, and his infirmities were

Declining
state of
Edward
III.

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greater than are frequently incident to that period. He had nearly withdrawn himself from all knowledge of public affairs, and studied only his ease. This was a matter of general notoriety; and the administration of his son was thus in a great degree in want of the royal name to give it currency and countenance. It was evident that the king drew toward the close of his life; at the same time that the health of the Black Prince, the heir apparent, was now in so deplorable a state, that his decease was almost daily expected. Every one therefore began to look toward a change in the head of the government, and to calculate anxiously respecting the events which might attend upon such an occurrence. The Black Prince had an only child, afterward Richard II, nine years of age. The individual nearest to the throne after him, was Philippa, only daughter of Lionel duke of Clarence. This lady had been married soon after the death of her father, to Edmund Mortimer earl of March^a, and had born him

^a Sandford, Book III, Chap. xiii.

several sons, now infants, the eldest of whom was afterward declared by Richard II. successor to the crown. The king of Castille, as the prince next of blood to the throne who was of full age, was looked to as the natural guardian of the realm in case of the death of Edward III. and the Black Prince; and this circumstance, while at first sight it gave additional weight to his measures and authority, excited the prudent and considerate to mark his proceedings with a jealous eye, and afforded an opening for the factious to misrepresent his most innocent actions, and to charge him with the basest intentions.

The laws of succession to the crown were by no means so well known and so indisputable at this time, as practice and the lapse of events have since rendered them. The monarchs who now reigned disdained to consult precedents from the time of the Saxons, and affected to date the commencement of civilisation and reason in the island from the period of the Conquest. Since that epoch many deviations had occurred from the ordinary course of succession. The younger

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Imputed
views of
the king
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tille.

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sons of William the Conqueror had obtained the crown in prejudice of the eldest. Stephen, the nephew of William by one of his daughters, had reigned after Henry I, thus superseding the claim of Henry's daughter the empress Maud, and her infant son. The minor son of an elder brother had in like manner been set aside when king John took possession of the crown.

The king of Castille therefore would have been at no loss for precedents and arguments drawn from past events, if he had in reality aspired to the throne. There were two circumstances however which in the present instance operated strongly in favour of the regular order of succession: the character of the Black Prince, which gave the people of England a feeling as if he were already in part the sovereign of the realm, and would not have suffered them for any inducement to tarnish the honour due to his memory by a disregard shown to his offspring; and the honourable temper which the whole of his history proves to have belonged to John of Gaunt, rendering ambition an inferior prin-

ciple in his breast to the love of honour and justice, and determining him in all cases to prefer the lustre of his name to the possession of an unfair and usurping authority. He was however a man of warm passions, of a generous nature, and hasty in resolution; the precise character that a cold and crafty adversary would desire, to play upon with dextrous artifice, to blacken with groundless accusations, and to provoke to false and impolitic measures.

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These circumstances were eagerly improved by the party which, as we have said, first raised itself into notice in the commencement of the present year. They did not neglect the obvious argument, of the necessity of securing the eventual succession of the minor prince, against the projects of an uncle, whose talents were considerable, and whose influence in the government of his country was great and of long standing. They affirmed that he had meditated the introduction of a law, to place the succession to the English crown upon a footing with the Salic law in France, hereby plainly indicating the ambitious views

Conspiracy
formed
against
him.

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which he secretly cherished^b. And they industriously propagated the rumour, that their machinations against him were privately countenanced by the Black Prince, now confined to his bed.

It is not easy to determine who were and who were not active in the party which was now formed. A list was drawn up of the persons to whom they desired that the powers of government might be confided. But this list contained the names of several who do not appear to have entered into their views. They probably wished to conciliate these individuals by such a measure, and by the sanction of their reputation to recommend the projects they had formed. The only guide therefore which we have, enabling us to determine who were the leaders, is the considering against whom the resentment of the

^b Parker, *De Antiquitate Britannicæ Ecclesiæ*, Cap. LVIII. Ms. Harleian. No. 6217. This manuscript is quoted by Lowth, in his *Life of Wykeham*, who has decided that it is the production, exactly or nearly, of the times to which it relates.

king of Castille was afterward directed. These were the earl of March husband to the princess Philippa and earl marshal of the realm, and William of Wykeham.

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The whole plot was prepared, and seems to have been arranged with great secrecy, previously to the meeting of parliament on the twenty-eighth of April^c. John of Gaunt was absent. He had been at Bruges, engaged in the negotiations which led to the prolongation of the truce between England and France, signed on the twelfth of March; and he was still detained by various affairs on the continent^d. It was while he continued abroad for the service of his country, that his adversaries opened their hostilities against him.

Convoca-
tion of
the Good
Parlia-
ment.

The faction which suddenly assumed the government of the kingdom was composed of strange materials. Courteney bishop of London, the most imperious churchman of the times, as well as Wykeham bishop of Win-

Coalition
of parties.

^c Cotton, ad ann.

^d Collins, Peerage of England: duke of Northumberland.

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chester, was among its leaders. Yet these men, for political purposes, found it convenient to combine with the followers of Wicliffe. It has never been suspected that Wicliffe himself was favourable to their views; his attachment to John of Gaunt was too firm and avowed to admit of such an imputation. His disciples however must have been at this time both numerous and powerful, to account for their tenets making so considerable a figure in the parliamentary proceedings of this year.

Remon-
strance
against
the usurp-
ations of
Rome.

Among these one of the most remarkable was a long bill preferred by the commons against the usurpations of the pope, affirming them to be the cause of all the plagues, injuries, famine and poverty of the realm, so that there was not left the third person, nor the third part of the commodities, within the kingdom, that it had lately contained. They added, that the tax paid to the pope for ecclesiastical dignities amounted to five times as much as the tax appertaining to the king for the whole realm; that, for one bishopric or other dignity, the pope had sometimes, by translation and death, three, four or five

several taxes ; that the brokers of the sinful city of Rome for money promoted many caiffes, altogether unlearned and unworthy, to livings of one thousand marks yearly, while the learned and worthy hardly obtained twenty marks ; that aliens, enemies to the land, and who never saw nor cared to see their parishioners, enjoyed these livings ; and that there was no prince in Christendom who possessed the fourth part so much treasure, as the pope drew out of this realm most sinfully. They observed that lay patrons, perceiving this simony and covetousness of the sovereign pontiff, learned to sell their benefices to beasts, no otherwise than as Christ was sold to the Jews ; and they prayed the king to re-edify and reform the church, the rather as this was the year of jubilee, the fiftieth of his reign, than which there could not be a more joyful occasion^e.

This mode of presenting a bill or representation to the king, with his reply, was in the fourteenth century the ordinary form

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^e Cotton, ad ann.

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for making a law. Edward III, who lay sick at Eltham when this remonstrance was presented to him, returned a cold answer, that he had heretofore by statute provided sufficient remedy, and that he was otherwise pursuing the points complained of with the pope^c. This answer may be supposed to have been perfectly agreeable to the ecclesiastical leaders of the moment, who intended that the business should have no other termination; at the same time that, by supporting the bill in the commons, they gained the good-will and countenance of the reforming party, and procured to the legislature who passed it the appellation of the Good Parliament from the populace.

Parliamentary prosecutions.

The commons then proceeded, in a way which has often been imitated since, to attack individuals who were trusted with the conduct of public affairs, for the purpose of bringing odium upon the general system of administration. After having voted the ordinary supplies, they drew up a protestation, in which they declared that, if the king had

^c Cotton, ad ann.

had faithful counsellors and servants, he could not but have surpassed all other princes in treasure, considering the ransoms which had been paid for the kings of France and Scotland, beside the subsidies he had received from his subjects. They accused Richard Lyons, farmer of the king's subsidies and customs, of backing certain improper licences for the transportation of commodities, of buying up the king's debts in some instances, and taking money to procure payment of them in others. They charged William lord Latimer, lord chamberlain, with having collected contributions in victuals and money, while he served under the king in Brittany, of which he had never rendered an account, with having sold provisions belonging to the army, and with various misdemeanours in the loss of certain towns and fortresses which had been taken by the French. They also accused John lord Neville of Raby, of having bought, or corruptly procured payment of, two debts due by the king, and of having received wages for an hundred soldiers serving in Brittany, to a greater amount, and for a longer time,

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than was due to him. Most of these charges are said to have been satisfactorily repelled.

Others, after an examination of the parties, were voted to be well founded. Each of the persons accused, together with several of a subordinate station, was committed to prison, the property of Lyons and lord Neville was declared confiscate, and lord Latimer was fined in the sum of twenty thousand marks^f.

They next adopted a measure, which can reflect nothing but disgrace upon the parties concerned, and in which was conspicuously blended the rigorous severity of puritanism, with the bold and unfeeling ambition of William of Wykeham.

History of
Catherine
Swinford.

The king of Castille lived at this time in open adultery. He had married, as we have before seen, the daughter of Peter the Cruel from ambitious views, for whom he does not seem to have ever felt any genuine attachment. The marriage appears to have been concluded with great precipitation, and was

^f In modern money £.120,000. Cotton, ad ann.

in every way inauspicious. It was perhaps the principal false step in the life of this prince.

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John of Gaunt however, though he had thus married, had not abjured the feelings of a man. Some years after having espoused the Spanish princess, he cast the eyes of affection upon the sister of Chaucer's wife, who has already more than once been mentioned^s. In the life-time of the duchess Blanche, she had attended upon that princess, and was afterward intrusted with the education of her daughters. This lady had since been married to sir Hugh Swinford. With the date of this event we are not acquainted; but the son and heir of sir Hugh appears to have been born in the year 1368, and the lady became a widow four years afterward^h. Stow has affirmed that she had previously been the concubine of the king of Castille, that she then married sir Hugh Swinford, and that

^s See particularly Vol. II, Chap. XXII, p. 198.

^h Esc. 46 Edv. 3, n. 54.

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after the death of her husband her intimacy with the king of Castille was renewed¹. But there is not the smallest foundation for this statement. In the sentence in which it is made, Stow confounds all chronology, by representing the previous connection as belonging to the period of John of Gaunt's second marriage. The marriage of sir Hugh Swinford must, as we have seen, have taken place at least four years prior to that event. The earliest trace I have discovered, forcibly indicating the connection of the king of Castille with Catherine Swinford, belongs to the year 1377^k. We may conceive that it was after the period of her becoming a widow in 1372, that she undertook the education of the king of Castille's daughters. They were too young at the time of their mother's death, and much more so at that of Catherine Swinford's marriage, to need a very accomplished instructress. It was out of the familiarity of

¹ Annals, A. D. 1396.

^k Rymer, Tom. VII, 51 Edv. 3, Mar. 4.

intercourse consequent upon this situation (in the language of Sandford, “ his often visits to the nursery”), that the attachment between her and her princely protector, of which we are here treating, insensibly grew.

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It is undoubtedly much to be regretted, that persons, occupying so eminent a station, should set such an example of disregard to those institutions and forms which are essential to the maintenance of the established order of society. But none but a bigot will affirm an error of this sort to be of such magnitude, as to disqualify a man, who is by his birth, according to the constitution of his country, called to a certain station, from discharging its functions, or entering upon its privileges.

An unfortunate coincidence existed as to the particular here treated of, between the situation of the king of Castille and of his father. There was a lady, said to have been of exquisite beauty, named Alice Perrers, who had attended upon the person of queen Philippa, in the same manner as Catherine Swinford had attended upon the duchess

of Alice
Perrers.

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Blanche. At least two years before the death of the queen we have strong presumptive evidence that Edward III. had indulged an amorous familiarity with this lady. Philippa indeed was then about fifty-five years of age; yet Edward III. was in one respect less excusable than the king of Castille, as we unquestionably know that queen Philippa was a woman of the most admirable endowments, and had discharged the duties of a wife and a mother to a numerous family, with a merit rarely to be paralleled in persons of her station.

The favour which Alice Perrers enjoyed from her royal lover was of the most conspicuous sort. Scarcely a year passed during the last ten years of Edward III, in which she did not receive some signal mark of the bounty of the crown. In the year 1368 the king bestowed upon her an estate which had devolved to him by the death of Mary his aunt, widow of Thomas of Brotherton younger son of Edward I¹; in 1373 he gave her

¹ Pat. 42 Edv. 3, p. 1, m. 2.

all the jewels and moveables which had belonged to his late queen Philippa^m; and the old historians have mentioned, as a proof of the king's devoted regard for her, that in the year 1374 in a tournament which was held in Cheapside, she appeared mounted upon a white palfrey, in splendid attire, as mistress of the solemnity, being distinguished by the appellation of the Lady of the Sunⁿ.

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This lady was one of the victims of party-rage selected by the Good Parliament. Among their votes hostile to the government one runs thus: The king ordaineth that henceforth no woman shall for maintenance or lucre present any matter in any of the king's courts, and particularly Alice Perrers, on pain of forfeiting all she has, and being banished the realm for ever. The historians are divided as to the manner in which this ordinance was carried into execution. One states that from

Parlia-
mentary
proceed-
ings
against
her.

^m Pat. 47 Edv. 3, p. 2, m. 23.

ⁿ Stow, Survey of London: Farringdon ward without.

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an oath was exacted, that she should never
again come into his presence. If this last
were the fact, the victor of the field of Cressy
must indeed have been sunk into a most hu-
miliating condition.

This however is not the whole of what was
done against Alice Perrers. We find by the
records of the ensuing parliament, that judg-
ment had been given against her, and (as
it would seem) her property confiscated^q.
Upon what articles of charge this proceeding
was founded does not appear. We shall pre-
sently have occasion to cite the judgment of
an impartial antiquary upon the accusations
exhibited against her by the same party in the
commencement of the following reign.

Considering that Wykeham was probably
the individual whose judgment was principally

^o Walsingham, A. D. 1376.

^p Ms. Harleian. No. 6217. The statement of Walsingham
also implies the same.

^q Cotton, 51 Edv. 3.

resorted to by the party by whom these measures were concerted; that he had in early youth become the favourite of Edward III, and that the king, having raised him from a humble station, had afterward profusely loaded him with preferments and wealth; it is not easy to find an instance in the records of history, in which private pique has in a more indecent and unprincipled manner prompted the conduct of a public character. It was a shameless example of ingratitude, for this man, who owed every thing to the bounty and partiality of his sovereign, thus to trample upon his dotage, and to drag his private weaknesses and foibles to the view and condemnation of the world. It was barbarous to dictate in this unfeeling manner to a monarch who had once been the arbiter of Europe; and to tear from the aged prince, now in his sixty-fifth year, a companion and confident whom habit had rendered necessary to him.

Such will be the decision of every candid observer, whatever may have been the faults imputed to the lady. The punishment ex-

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ceeded the offence; and a generous mind would at least have found some expedient less harsh than that of forbidding to the venerable king her society and conversation. It is fair however to take into the account the charges that were exhibited against her. She is insinuated in the ordinance, to have presented matter in the king's courts for maintenance and lucre. Stow says, that "shee, exceeding the manner of women, sate by the king's justices, and sometimes by the doctors in the consistories, perswading and dissuading" them. But it is Stow also who says, that, when the king was on his death-bed, she amused him with "talk rather of hawking and hunting, than of any thing that pertained to the saving of his soule;" and that, when she found he was at the point of expiring, "shee tooke the ringes from his fingers, which for the royaltie of his majestie hee was wont to weare, and so withdrew her selfe from him:" a vulgar rumour, which no

^r A.D. 1376, 1377. These censures are copied by Stow from the monastic chronicle of Thomas Walsingham.

impartial and capable writer would have con-
descended to echo. Sir Robert Cotton gives
it as his opinion, that "the record against the
said dame [1 Ric. 2.] being very long, proveth
no such heinous matter against her; and,
these two suits wherefore she was con-
demned, seemed very honest; her mishap
was, that she was friendly to many, but all
were not so to her." In fine, after the death
of Edward III. she married lord Windsor,
lord lieutenant of Ireland, one of the most
distinguished nobles and soldiers of his time;
a circumstance which affords considerable
presumption that nothing base or abandoned
was generally believed against her.

It is natural then to enquire what could
be the motive with the prevailing party in
parliament, for so violently trampling upon
the decorum due to a venerable character,
and compelling the king thus publicly to dis-
card the chosen companion of his hours of
retirement and leisure. It was done partly
no doubt on the same principle that had
dictated the long bill against Rome in the

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commons; the desire to cajole the favour, and purchase the good opinion, of the puritanical party. They were beside well pleased by this proceeding to throw a stigma upon the private conduct of the king of Castille, though they had no pretence to interfere in his domestic concerns. We have also abundant reason to believe that this lady, however by her conduct she had forfeited her character with her own sex, was not deficient in integrity and spirit to defend her royal lover from injury and insult. Add to which, to degrade their sovereign, and to hold him up to public view as the victim of imbecility and dotage, were the suitable means to reconcile the nation to their next measure, with which all their others were connected, and to which they were subordinate.

Executive
govern-
ment put
into com-
mission.

Having thus in various ways shown the turbulence and rudeness of its character, the parliament completed its encroachments by appointing a committee of nine counsellors, consisting of the archbishop of Canterbury, the bishops of London and Winchester, the

earls of March, Arundel and Stafford, and the lords Percy, Brian and Beauchamp^s, together with the chancellor, treasurer, and keeper of the privy seal, for the time being, without whose consent nothing of importance in the public concerns should be transacted. This sort of committee of government was formed precisely upon the model of the usurpations of the barons in the reigns of Henry III. and Edward II, when it has been supposed that not only the character of the reigning sovereign was degraded, but that the constitution was made dangerously to incline toward a fierce and uncontrollable aristocracy, such as the government of Poland afterward became. Thus did this arrogant prelate proceed in the gratification of his passions, exposing without compunction the privacies of his sovereign, not hesitating to undermine the monarchy itself, and showing himself willing to bring the church establishment into

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^s MS. Harleian. No. 247.

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danger, rather than not gratify his love of political power, or his thirst of private revenge against the prince who had deprived him of office.

Of the counsellors who were appointed to constitute the committee of government, all are not understood to have entered into the cabal against the king of Castille. The archbishop of Canterbury is supposed to have inclined to his party, and lord Percy appears to have been at this time abroad in his train*. This nobleman was afterward earl of Northumberland, and father of Henry surnamed Hotspur.

New am-
bassadors.

The last measure adopted against the king of Castille was the superseding him in his office of negotiator for a treaty of peace with the court of France. On the twelfth of June the new committee of government named John Gilbert now bishop of Hereford, John lord Cobham, and two others,

* Collins, Peerage of England, ubi supra,

ministers plenipotentiary to treat with the ambassadors of Charles V. in the room of John of Gaunt and his colleagues ^u.

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It was during this period of commotion and disaster, in which his name was treacherously employed to insult his father and undermine the government, that the Black Prince expired. This melancholy event is supposed to have rendered the aged king the more reckless of what followed, and passive in the hands of the usurpers.

Decease of
the Black
Prince.

I cannot dismiss finally the character of the Black Prince, without noticing an admirably expressive phrase with which Froissart winds up his narrative of the battle of Poitiers: The prince of Wales, says he, who was as courageous and cruel as a lion, took great pleasure this day in fighting and chasing his enemies ^w. In these words we have presented to us a striking image of the manners and temper of the knights of chivalry. They

His mili-
tary cha-
racter.

^u Rymer, Tom. VII, 50 Edv. 3, Jun. 12.

^w Vol. I, Chap. clxiv.

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were men of courtesy and honour. Take them in the chamber of peace ; it is impossible to figure to ourselves any thing more humane. When occasion called them to succour the oppressed, and raise the dejected, overwhelmed by some brutal and insulting foe, they appeared like Gods descended from heaven for the consolation of mankind. But the garb of peace, however gracefully they wore it, they regarded as only an accident of their character. War was their profession, their favourite scene, the sustenance of their life. If it did not offer itself to them at home, they would seek it to the ends of the earth, and sell themselves to any master, rather than not find occasion to prove the intrepidity of their temper, and the force of their arm. When they entered the field of battle, they regarded the business of war, not as a matter of dire and tremendous necessity, but as their selected pleasure. Their hearts were then particularly alive, and all their pulses beat with joy. They fought like tygers, and hunted their fellow men as the fierce Numidian pursues

his savage prey. Soldiers in almost all cases of war, but particularly in the history of these rude and early ages, subsist partly by ravage, robbery and spoil ; and we may easily conceive what sort of temper this is likely to beget toward the helpless and unoffending victims of their plunder. It is a part of the art of war to lay waste whole provinces, that the enemy may be reduced to want. One of the great lessons of the military school is to estimate human life at a very cheap rate. These unfortunate errors all became much exaggerated in our ancestors, by the immeasurable distance which rank at that time placed between man and man. They mowed down whole companies of ordinary men, with no greater remorse than the peasant feels when he mows his field. They snuffed the scent of blood, and found themselves refreshed. This part of the chivalrous character is exactly illustrated in the sack of Limoges in 1370. While the question was only of the lives of men of an unhonoured class, of women and children, the Black Prince felt no touch of pity. He had been exasperated

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at the treachery of the ecclesiastical chief of the city, and his rage must be appeased. It was not till he saw illustrious knights and nobles gallantly and desperately contending for their lives with his royal brothers, that his resentment gave way, and he extended the olive of peace to all.

It is incumbent upon us to conclude these reflections by stating that the vices of the Black Prince were those of his occupation and his times, and that his virtues were such as to set all parallel among his contemporaries at defiance.

A short time after the melancholy event of his death, the commons petitioned that the young prince his son, now heir apparent to the crown, might be sent to them, and appear in open parliament; and, their request in this point having been complied with, they immediately passed an unanimous vote praying that the lords would create him prince of Wales, as his father had been. The house of lords however, with more discretion or decency, answered that the power of complying with this prayer lay not with

them, but that the king must be applied to for that purpose^x.

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Reflec-
tions.

Whatever was the immediate success of the proceedings of this parliament, the ultimate consequences were singularly unfavourable to the king of Castille. The assembly in which they had passed obtained, as we have seen, the appellation of the Good Parliament; and, as this name sufficiently indicates, had taken deep root in the general opinion. They had skilfully blended their proceedings with the ideas of the reformation of the church which were at this time in their highest tide of public favour; and, though John of Gaunt had really laboured for reformation and the heads of the usurping party were its most determined adversaries, the people of England had not the sagacity to discern this, through the mist of delusion which was artfully employed to obscure it. The leaders of the reigning faction may now be considered as

^x Cotton, 50 Edv. 3.

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ambitious and ill-designing men ; but, when defeated in their ends, they were at that time regarded with affection as the martyrs of the public cause. If the heart of the king of Castille was upright, his manners were not popular. In a word, this period was the crisis of his public life. Hitherto his career, on the whole, had been fortunate ; from this time his lot was cast among troubles, obstinate contention, and eternal animosity. The calumnies which his enemies had propagated against him as seeking the ruin of his nephew were fastened upon his character ; and the impatience he displayed under the imputation was explained as an indication of guilt, and led him into various measures hasty, unadvised and ungracious, thus continually affording new scope to the perverse and cold-blooded industry of his foes.

This consequence he partly foresaw, and his temper became to a certain degree embittered by the reflection. Another consequence resulted, which we may reasonably believe he did not foresee. The historians, contemporary with these events, were monks ;

and they regarded John of Gaunt with aversion and horror on account of his patronage of Wicliffe. The event has been, that we read in them continually of John of Gaunt's infamous designs to poison his nephew, to supersede the next heirs, and audaciously to possess himself of the crown; of the bondage in which he held Edward III; and of the resolution of the Black Prince to spend the last efforts of his expiring strength in defeating these base machinations. The Good Parliament of the populace of 1376 is the Good Parliament still. The monks forgave them their zeal in the cause of heresy, since it was directed against the arch-heretic, the king of Castille; and succeeding generations, in consideration of their merit as the advocates of reformation, have remitted to them all their treasons. In the mean time, it is impossible to listen with an impartial ear to their achievements, and to hesitate as to the character that is due to them.

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JOHN OF GAUNT NAMED TO ASSIST HIS FATHER
IN THE GOVERNMENT.—PROSECUTION AGAINST
WYKEHAM.—CITATION OF WICLIFFE.—CHAUCER'S
EMBASSY TO FRANCE.—FAILS OF SUCCESS.—WAR,
—DEATH OF EDWARD III.

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XL.

1376.
John of
Gaunts
returns
home.

THE king of Castille, who was now at
Bordeaux, heard with astonishment of the
violence and insolences that were practising
in his native country, and went on board
certain vessels prepared for the purpose, with
lord Percy and other nobles his followers, on
the eighth of July. The parliament, whether
alarmed at the idea of his approach or for
some other cause, broke up two days after,
and left their committee of government to
maintain its station as it could.

overturns
the usurp-
ation of
Wyke-
ham.

What were the measures adopted by the
king of Castille on his arrival, or in what

manner the committee of government endeavoured to defend themselves, history has not informed us. Edward III. received his beloved son with open arms; the newly constituted committee was superseded without ceremony; John of Gaunt was declared the associate of his father in the government; and lord Latimer and the rest who had been prosecuted by the late house of commons, together with Alice Perrers, were recalled to court^a.

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The king of Castille however did not stop at this point. He thought it necessary to inflict some punishment upon the persons who had thus grossly insulted him, and flagrantly violated the laws of decency and the constitution of their country. If however we compare his vengeance with what was done under similar circumstances in the reigns of Edward II. and Richard II, we shall not fail to be struck with mildness of his proceeding.

Punish-
ment of
the
usurpers.

^a Walsingham, ad ann.

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1376.
sir Peter
Dela-
mare. Sir Peter Delamare, steward to the earl of March, had undertaken the management of the house of commons in the late parliament, and is said to have conducted himself in the business, not only with great spirit and zeal, but with singular abilities and eloquence. This man was arrested, and conveyed prisoner to the castle of Newark, and afterward to Nottingham^b. It was made matter of complaint against John of Gaunt, that he was seized when he presented himself in attendance upon the court, and, without any answer, and against all justice, committed to close custody^b.

the earl of
March.

It is somewhat doubtful whether the king of Castille purposed to inflict any personal retribution upon the earl of March himself. All that is known on the subject, is that orders were issued to him from the king that, in quality of earl marshal of England, he should make inspection of the castle and town of Calais, as also of the castles and forts in the

^b Ms. Harleian, No. 6217. Stow, ad ann.

marches of Calais, should cause such repairs to be made as need might require, and should see them well victualled and manned^c. The earl of March declared his repugnance to this commission, and chose rather to resign his marshal's staff than engage in it. John of Gaunt willingly accepted his determination, and immediately transferred the office of earl marshal, together with the commission respecting Calais, to his friend, lord Percy^d.

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The king of Castille proceeded with greater severity against William of Wykeham. The political grounds of this severity have already been developed; and certainly no conduct could be more worthy of reprehension than that of this ambitious leader. He had however, in the true style of a crafty and practised statesman, sheltered himself behind the forms of law, and was inaccessible to the ordinary modes of proceeding against a public delinquent. What he had done in the affair

Articles of
accusation
against
Wyke-
ham.

^c Ms. Harleian. No. 6217. Stow, ad ann.

^d Ms. Harleian and Stow, ubi supra. Collins, Peerage: earl of Northumberland.

CHAP. of Alice Perrers was of course not fitting
XL.
1376. matter for animadversion in the courts ; and,
in all the measures adopted by the reigning
faction in the Good Parliament, he was suffi-
ciently covered by that apology which has so
frequently been at the service of bad ministers
since, that he was but an individual, and
that those measures to which the legislature
of the nation had given its sanction were not
proper subjects for a charge against one.
The king of Castille therefore adopted as a
model in the proceedings against Wykeham,
the measures which had been employed in
the Good Parliament against lord Latimer
and other of the king's ministers. Articles
of accusation were drawn up, charging him
with having, during the eight years next
following after the peace of Bretigni, em-
bezzled the ransoms of the kings of France
and Scotland, and other receipts to a great
amount, which for the most part had not been
applied to the profit of the king and kingdom,
and which, if properly husbanded, would
have spared the king the necessity of bur-
thening his subjects with subsidies and loans

on the breaking out of the subsequent war; with imposing heavy fines upon meritorious officers of the army, thereby driving them to acts of depredation and outlawry, and so bringing upon the nation the unhappy war of 1369; and with having grossly neglected the defence of Ponthieu, in consequence of which that country fell into the hands of the French without resistance in the commencement of the war^e.

The biographer of Wykeham has extremely well, and with great force of reasoning, commented upon these articles of accusation^f, particularly remonstrating against the informality of charging upon Wykeham the general misapplication of the revenues of the kingdom, at a time when he was only chancellor, and by no means presided over the treasury of the realm. But this biographer, so quick-sighted when any accusation occurs bearing with severity upon the

^e Rymer, Tom. VII, 1 Ric. 2, Jul. 30.

^f Lowth, Sect. IV.

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hero of his volume, passes over without animadversion his discreditable and time-serving alliance with the Lollards, his ungrateful and insolent intrusion upon the private hours of his royal benefactor, and his abetting a party whose purpose was to strip the crown of its prerogatives, and convert the government into a dangerous oligarchy. In all this, bishop Lowth says, "he stedfastly adhered to the interest of his great friend and patron the prince of Wales; and at the same time to the interests of the king, his kind master and generous benefactor; and to the interests of the public; which were indeed all equally concerned in the security of the lineal succession: and acted with so open and unreserved a zeal in this just and important cause, as could not but give offence to the duke of Lancaster^s."

Temporal-
ities of
his bishop-
ric seques-
tered.

The articles of accusation against Wykeham were exhibited before the council, in Michaelmas term of this year. A hearing

^s Lowth, Sect. IV.

shortly after took place before certain prelates and lords of the council deputed for that purpose, who, out of seven articles of charge, deferred the consideration of the first six, and came to a decision only upon the last. The purport of this article was, that Wykeham, while chancellor, had often irregularly, and of his own mere authority, reduced the amount of the fines entered in the Fine Rolls, and caused the rolls to be cancelled and altered; and particularly that he had in this manner changed the fine of one individual, who is named, from fourscore to forty pounds sterling^b. Upon this charge the lords decided that the temporalities of the bishopric of Winchester should be seized into the hands of the king, till Wykeham should have made satisfaction to the king for his delinquency in this point. Shortly after, an order was issued, forbidding him to come within twenty miles of the courtⁱ. These proceedings took place in the month of November.

^b Rymer, ubi supra, Jul. 31.

ⁱ Ms. Harleian. No. 6217. Parker, De Antiquitate Britannicæ Ecclesiæ, Cap. LVIII.

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Undoubtedly the article upon which Wykeham was condemned makes an insignificant figure in comparison with the grave and important crimes which were in the other articles laid to his charge, and which we have above enumerated. It is not practicable for us to decide, whether this article was selected as admitting of stricter and easier proof; or whether, which seems more probable, his illustrious adversary, from motives of clemency or of policy, was unwilling to drive Wykeham to despair, and studiously left a door open to conciliation and remission, at the same time that the heavier accusations were still suspended over his head. The measures adopted against him were certainly of the milder cast, and not such as would have been adopted by a vindictive foe, who had been thus mortally offended. Wykeham had been so assiduous and successful in the accumulation of wealth, that he might well spare the revenues of his bishopric during the time when he was thus under a cloud, without having any great injury to appeal to as a topic of complaint.

Having employed these methods of severity, if they deserve the name, the king of Castille next hastened to refute in the most effectual way the calumnies of his enemies, by installing in a solemn manner, on the twentieth of November, his nephew Richard in the dignities of prince of Wales, and formally declaring him successor to the crown. On this occasion an oath was taken by the nobles attendant upon the court, and particularly by the king's sons, by which they engaged to maintain and uphold his right, as their only lawful and undoubted sovereign, in the event of the decease of his grandfather^k. It has been further remarked, as an act of animosity against Wykeham, that a grant was made, on the fifteenth of March following^l, of the temporalities of the bishopric of Winchester to the minor prince, in part of payment of the revenue which the king had settled upon him. But this seems scarcely

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1376,
Richard
created
prince of
Wales.

^k Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. cccxxv.

^l Rymer, ad annum & diem.

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1376. to deserve so harsh a name. The temporalities, while sequestered by the act of council, must be enjoyed by some one; nor did this act in any degree increase the difficulty of restitution, as there was a clause in the grant to Richard, expressly stating that he was to receive the revenues of the bishopric for so long a time only as it should be thought proper to retain them in the hands of the king.

Another method was judiciously employed by the king of Castille, to mark the certainty of succession in his nephew. Edward III. had a sufficient interval of health toward the close of the year, to enable him to eat his Christmas dinner in public, according to the mode of the times. This festival was therefore celebrated with great magnificence, and prince Richard was seated at table in royal state above his uncles, as being already their superior in station, and by anticipation their master^m. This exhibition, in itself of little

^m Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. cccxxv.

importance, was happily chosen, as tending to refute, by an appeal to the senses, the calumnies with which ill-designing men had sought to disturb the tranquillity of the realm.

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It was in the course of the present year, and only a few days after John of Gaunt took his departure from Bourdeaux, that Chaucer obtained a grant of contraband wool, forfeited to the crown, to the amount of £.71 : 4 : 6ⁿ: in present valuation, £. 1,262 : 1 : —. This grant, in addition to other circumstances, may serve to show how high Chaucer stood in the favour of the king of Castille, as it must have received the royal sanction almost at the instant of that prince's arrival in London, and while all the anxieties arising from his contest with his ungenerous enemies were fresh and unabated in his mind.

Further
mark of
favour
bestowed
upon
Chaucer.

A parliament was called in the beginning of the following year, and a writ made out authorising the young prince of Wales to

1377.

A parlia-
ment.

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 1377. open the session in the indisposition of his grandfather°. This parliament entered completely into the views of the king of Castille, and revoked the proceedings of the former year against lord Latimer, Richard Lyons, Alice Perrers and the rest, as having been obtained by false suggestions, and without due process. An act of general pardon was also passed, in consideration of the king having completed the fiftieth year of his reign, Wykeham alone being excepted^p. The meeting was dissolved by the king in person at his palace of Shene on the twenty-third of February, after a continuance of four weeks only.

Citation of
 Wicliffe.

An event occurred at this time tending still further to unveil the character of the leaders of the predominant party in the Good Parliament. We have seen the coalition into which they entered at that period with the

° Cotton, 51 Edv. 3.

^p Statutes at Large, printed by Berthelette, 1543. Stat. 50 (by mistake for 51) Edv. 3, cap. 3. See Cotton, ubi supra.

followers of Wicliffe. But they felt like CHAP.
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true politicians, superior to the ordinary passions and weaknesses of human nature. 1377.

While they used this sect, and obtained for themselves a momentary popularity by means of its numbers and importance, they had resolved upon its destruction. Being now themselves in adversity, they were the more bent upon this object; their hatred rose, in proportion to their disappointment. Besides, the chief of the obnoxious sect was avowedly patronised by the king of Castille, and to attack him was to injure his protector on the side where he was most obviously vulnerable.

The convocation of the clergy met on the third of February, one week subsequently to the opening of the parliament^a. Immediately afterward, Wicliffe was cited to answer before his superiors, perhaps the upper house of convocation, to certain articles which were charged against him as innovation and heresy. The day fixed for the hearing was the nine-

^a Parker, *ubi supra*.

CHAP. XL. ^{1377.}teenth of February; the place, St. Paul's.

The king of Castille, with that openness and intrepidity of temper which mark all his actions, determined not to leave the man he had patronised a prey to the malice of his enemies. He accordingly resolved, accompanied by the earl marshal and other friends, to repair with Wicliffe to the scene of trial. Sudbury, now archbishop of Canterbury, presided; Courteney, his successor in the see of London, took the lead in this prosecution^r. This prelate had not expected the arrival of so illustrious visitors, and was irritated. High words arose on both sides, the representation of which has been handed down to us only by the monkish historians; the whole became a scene of confusion; and the sitting was abruptly dispersed. An order was soon after promulgated by its authority, enjoining silence upon Wicliffe in future, relative to the articles in question. This proposition was wholly disregarded.

^r Walsingham, ad ann.

The biographers of Wykeham and Wicliffe have endeavoured to throw some uncertainty upon this date^s. Bishop Lowth says, "This affair could not have happened many days before the death of Edward III;" and Lewis is disposed to carry it over to the February of the following year. Their argument is founded upon the date of the pope's bulls against Wicliffe, May 22, 1377^t. But the concurrence of all the contemporary writers is strongly against them^u. These writers also casually mention the days of the week, which will be found to correspond with the days of the month to which they are assigned; an indirect evidence of great value. It is impossible that the transaction should belong,

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^s Lowth, Sect. IV. Lewis, Chap. IV.

^t See Walsingham, A. D. 1378, by whom they are recited at large.

^u Walsingham, ad ann. Ms. Harleian. No. 6217. Stow is more full and minute than either of these writers, and evidently proceeds on the authority of some narrative which has not come down to us. Fox, Hollinshed, and other of the old writers, may be understood to have possessed a similar advantage.

CHAP. XL. as Lewis has imagined, to the February of

the following year. Lord Percy was then no
1377. longer earl marshal: he would besides have
been mentioned by his new title, conferred
at the coronation of Richard, of earl of
Northumberland: and various particulars are
introduced respecting the old king, some per-
haps true and some false, but all marking
the perfect consciousness of the old historians
as to the reign in which the event happened.
The whole is apparently the struggle of two
powerful and violent parties, in the view of
the great change which was shortly to occur.
The argument from the date of the pope's
bulls is of little force; since it is easy to sup-
pose that the citation to St. Paul's was the
immediate and personal act of the English
prelacy, and that the citation of Wicliffe to
Lambeth which occurred in the following
year was the result of the pope's inter-
ference, the English bishops having found
themselves too weak in the contest, and on
that account having invited the interposition
of the sovereign pontiff. This hypothesis is
partly confirmed by the circumstance of Wal-

singham inserting the bulls under the following year.

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1377.

Calumnies
against
the king
of Cas-
tille.

On this occasion we are presented with a fresh example of the talents of this party in the arts of calumny. They industriously propagated a rumour that, on the day preceding the affair at St. Paul's, a proposition had been brought before parliament, by Thomas of Woodstock younger son of Edward III. and lord Percy earl marshal, that there should be no more a mayor of London according to ancient custom, but that a captain should be appointed to preside over the metropolis, who should hold his office under the marshal of England, and be in all respects subject to his direction^w. There is no trace of this proposition in the records; and historians have now generally agreed to treat it as the fabrication of the moment^t. A meeting however of the citizens is said to have been called on the twentieth, in which

^w Stow, ad ann.

^t Earnes, Book IV, Chap. xiv, §. 7. Lowth, Sect. IV.

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1377. they were cautioned against the designs of government upon their charter, and exhorted to take timely measures to prevent the menaced evil. It was added, by way of exasperating the populace, that the king of Castille had threatened to drag their bishop by the hair of his head out of his own cathedral.

Tumult.

The consequence of these machinations was, that an immense multitude, having assembled on the day of the city consultation, proceeded immediately to the mansion of the earl marshal, broke open the gates, set at liberty a prisoner they found there, and searched the whole house for lord Percy, with intent to insult or destroy him. From this place they proceeded to John of Gaunt's palace of the Savoy, where they committed similar outrages^y. Here however, we are told the bishop of London made his appearance, undertook to pacify the mob, and intreated them to conduct themselves with more pro-

^y Walsingham, Hollinshed and Stow, ad. ann.

priety, particularly in consideration of the holy season, it being Lent. Awed by his remonstrances, they withdrew, and contented themselves during the rest of the day, with hanging up in different parts of the city, the king of Castille's armorial bearings reversed, this being a mode of proceeding appropriated to signify that the person to whom they belonged was a traitor^z. At the same time scurrilous rhymes and other abusive papers were posted in various places, for the purpose of bringing the government of the king of Castille into contempt^a.

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These measures, however low and contemptible they may now appear, had a memorable effect, at a time when knowledge and instruction were confined to so few, in fixing a lasting unpopularity and odium upon the personage against whom they were directed. They could not have occurred at a more unfortunate or critical

Mayor dismissed
from his
office.

^z Walsingham, Hollinshed and Stow, ad ann.

^a Stow, ad ann.

CHAP. XL.
 1377. moment, when the decease of the king was daily expected, and when every expedient would be requisite to give weight and importance to the regency which was to ensue, and to secure the tranquillity and defence of the kingdom. It seems that the city magistrates were understood to have in some way abetted or connived at the tumult, since we find that they were deprived of their offices, and that others were substituted for the remainder of the year^b.

Negotiations with France.

It has already been mentioned that the truce between England and France was to expire on the first of April of this year. A principal object therefore pressing upon the attention of the king of Castille was to place the relative situation of the two countries upon the most unequivocal footing, either by a treaty of peace, or, if that could not be effected, by a prolongation of the truce. It

^b Walsingham says, *majorem & seniores deponit*. I doubt whether this is to be construed as extending to the court of aldermen. It is however so interpreted by Stow; and since him by Collins, and others.

was peculiarly desirable that the reign of the minor prince, the commencement of which appeared to be near, should be uninterrupted with foreign misunderstandings. The proceedings which had taken place in the Good Parliament sufficiently indicated that, if the regency were placed in honourable hands, there would still be an adverse faction to contend with, powerful in ability, daring in temper, and little restrained by scruples arising from decorum or public interest, who would afford to the government, fettered as it must necessarily be during a minority, abundant matter for activity, anxiety and vigilance in its domestic concerns. They had even in all probability rendered the foreign negotiation more difficult, by changing the persons intrusted with the embassy, and thus betraying, to a prince so crafty as Charles V, the weakness of the government with which he had to deal.

In this situation new plenipotentiaries were commissioned, with such instructions as were thought best adapted to the actual posture of affairs, from London to Bruges, where they

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1377.

Proposal
for the
marriage
of the
prince of
Wales.

were met by the ambassadors of France^c.

The persons named in the commission were bishop Gilbert, who had been placed in the same situation by the usurping party of the preceding year, John lord Cobham, and two others. One motive for placing Gilbert at the head of the commission was probably to preserve an air of consistency and system on the English side in the negotiation ; at the same time that it must be admitted as some argument of the confidence reposed in this prelate by the king of Castille. Two nuncios from Rome still acted as mediators on the part of the pope, and were unfeignedly zealous in endeavouring to discover expedients by which a sincere amity might be established between the rival crowns. One proposition suggested by them, according to Froissart, was a treaty of marriage between the young prince Richard, now ten years old, and a daughter of Charles V, who was probably about the same age. This was so

† Franc. 51 Edv. 3, m.

favourably received by both parties, that, the negotiation being broken off, a secret commission was appointed from both courts, to meet at Calais, to consult on the subject. The treaty failed however, on some demand made by the French court, from which they would not recede. Their offer is said to have been, the regular cession of a considerable territory in Aquitaine, by way of portion to the princess; and their demand, that the English should surrender Calais, and whatever else they held or pretended to in the north of France. Every idea however of resigning Calais was firmly rejected; and, the negotiators having stipulated a prolongation of the truce for a month only, a new and more solemn embassy was prepared, consisting, on the English part, of the bishop of St. David's lord chancellor, bishop Gilbert, the earl of Salisbury, and six others^d. This

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^d Rymer, 51 Edv. 3, Apr. 26. On the eleventh of January Adam Houghton bishop of St. David's had been appointed lord chancellor, and Henry Wakefield bishop of Worcester,

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 1377. embassy was equally ineffective with the preceding; the truce was no further prolonged; and the two kingdoms were brought once again into a state of war. Such had probably, in contemplation of the approaching minority in England, been the uniform intention of the king of France.

Chaucer
 employed
 in this ne-
 gotiation.

Many of the preceding particulars rest upon the authority of Froissart^c. They are interesting to the biography of Chaucer, as, according to this historian, the intermediate commission for treating specially concerning the marriage of the prince of Wales consisted of three persons; sir Guichard Dangle, sir Richard Stan or Sturry, and Geoffrey Chaucer. Taking for granted the correctness of this representation, it supplies a very material incident in the life of the poet. If we consider the subject of the negotiation, no commission would in that age be construed as

lord treasurer of the realm; these high offices being thus restored to the clergy, after a proscription which had subsisted about six years.

^c Vol I, Chap. cccxxv.

more honourable than that of obtaining a
 consort for the future king, nor is there any
 in which it is usual to be more scrupulously
 exact respecting the rank and personal im-
 portance of the negotiators. If we consider
 the character of the poet's fellow commis-
 sioners, this also will make his present ap-
 pointment appear striking and observable.
 Sir Guichard Dangle in particular was at this
 time, whether in reputation of military ser-
 vices, or in eminent ability for affairs, and
 distinguished trust, one of the first persons in
 the court of London. When the Black Prince
 fixed his residence in Aquitaine, the two
 principal officers in his government were sir
 John Chandos constable, and sir Guichard
 Dangle marshal, of the duchy¹. On the death
 of sir Walter Manny sir Guichard was elected
 knight of the Garter in his room²; and at the
 accession of Richard II. he was created earl of

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¹ Froissart, Vol. I, Chap. ccxvi.

² Froissart, Chap. ccii. Barnes, Book IV, Chap. ix, §. 3.

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Huntingdon, and appointed governor to the minor king^h.

1377.

Station occupied by him on this occasion.

The *Rotuli Franciæ* of the last year of Edward III, which contain the principal records in relation to transactions with that power, do not however operate in confirmation of the narrative of Froissart. The name of Chaucer occurs twice in them, he appearing in each instance to have obtained letters of protection from the king, as about to be employed abroad in the secret affairs of government. But his name in both cases stands single in the record; and the letters of protection are dated, in the first example on the twelfth of Februaryⁱ, eight days prior to the earliest of the above embassies, and in the second on the twenty-eighth of April^k, two days subsequent to the latest. Neither of these records can be construed as applying to the intermediate embassy of which Frois-

^h Rymer, 1 Ric. 2, Jul. 15. Froissart, Chap. cccxxvi.

ⁱ Appendix, No.

^k Ditto, No.

sart speaks. The name of sir Guichard Dangle occurs among the names of those appointed to the last and most solemn embassy. CHAP.
XL.
1377.

In answer however to the want of countenance which the narrative of Froissart experiences from the records, it may be alleged, first, that his relation is characterised by that minuteness of detail which ordinarily accompanies the statement of a man acquainted with the facts he describes. Secondly, the narrative itself, as to the principal point to which it relates, is attended with no improbability. The proposal of a marriage, for the purpose of terminating a difference between two adverse nations, sufficiently accords with the mode of the times we are considering. Lastly, the commission in which Chaucer is supposed to have been employed with sir Guichard Dangle and sir Richard Sturry, is stated by Froissart to have been secret; and this may be thought an adequate reason why no notice of it should occur in the authentic records of the period. There is a patent in Rymer, empowering certain persons to treat

CHAP. for this marriage, soon after the accession of
 XL.
 Richard¹.

1377.
 Wykeham
 restored.

Notwithstanding the inauspicious circumstances under which Wykeham was placed by the parliament of 1377, his disgrace did not continue long. His friends were powerful, and the king of Castille was placable. A session of the convocation of the church, as we have seen, was held about the same time with that of the parliament; and, immediately on their meeting, Courteney bishop of London noticed the absence of the bishop of Winchester, and moved that no subsidy should be granted to the king, till that prelate should appear in his place^m. Most of the bishops, either from party-spirit, or as conceiving that the privileges of their order were wounded in him, concurred in the proposition; and it was urged with so much spirit that the government at last thought proper to comply. Shortly after, a negotiation was opened for the restitution of the

¹ Tom. VII, 1 Ric. 2, Jan. 16.

^m Parker, Cap. LVIII.

temporalities, and on the eighteenth of June, three days before the death of Edward III, a writ was issued for that purpose, on condition of his paying to the king a certain sum of money for the service of the warⁿ. His sureties on this occasion were the earls of March, Arundel and Warwic; and it is affirmed by the old historians that Alice Perers was particularly instrumental in obtaining for him this composition^o. Proud as the bishop was, he knew how to accommodate himself to the times, and to bow at the shrine of beauty when it became necessary to his more serious purposes.

CHAP.
XL.

1377.
Death of
Edward
III.

The faults of Edward III. were the faults of his times; a love of magnificence, and a love of war. By the latter of these passions he produced a dreadful degree of misery, especially to the devoted country he invaded. To his mind the sentiment by which he was

His cha-
racter.

ⁿ Rymer, ad annum & diem.

^o Ms. Harleian. No. 6217. Stow, ad ann. Parker, ubi supra.

CHAP
XL.

1377.

impelled appeared generous, elevated and pure, such as might have done honour to the noblest spirits. Yet in truth it was bloody, murderous and cruel. If Edward III. ever read the story of his own wars, if he ever heard of the barbarous and inhuman intestine scenes which followed upon the battle of Poitiers^p, he must have shuddered at the terrible consequences of the holiday passion he indulged, and have cast his laurels from him with impatience and loathing. His propensity was the propensity of a school-boy; its effects were those of the malignity of a demon.

Yet with this destructive and fatal bias, Edward III. joined, if not all the ability, and all the ardent good-will, that ever existed in a warrior, at least as few positive vices as were almost ever found in so eminent a station. He was a good husband, and an excellent father. He was kind to all; severe and truculent to none. His sentiments were

^p See Vol. I, Chap. XIX, p. 404.

always manly and generous; and so far as CHAR. XL. circumstances seemed to permit it, he was 1377. at all times equable, mild and humane.

These branches of the character of Edward III. have been already sufficiently known. The course of our enquiry has enabled us to add one more to the catalogue of his princely virtues. He was a lover of learning and learned men, and did not degenerate from the example of the Plantagenets who had gone before him, Henry II. and Edward I, in his patronage of literature and the arts. Not to mention the splendid style in which he finished St. Stephen's Chapel by a labour scarcely shorter in duration than his reign, the rebuilding of Windsor Castle, and the favour he displayed toward Wykeham, founded probably from the first upon his talent for the arts of design, he has been clearly shown to have been the original patron of Chaucer and Gower. To him therefore we are in a considerable degree indebted for the present structure of the English language, as well as for the

A lover of
learning.

CHAP. XL. genius, invention, and rich and diversified
 fancy, which, in various parts of their
 works, are displayed by these celebrated
 writers.

CHAP. XLI.

CORONATION OF RICHARD II.—RETIREMENT OF
THE KING OF CASTILLE.—APPOINTED COM-
MANDER IN CHIEF.—SITUATION OF CHAUCER
UNDER THE NEW REIGN.

IMMEDIATELY on the death of his il-
lustrious father, the king of Castille resolved
upon that system of conduct which he uni-
formly pursued for the rest of his life. His
first object was to place his nephew securely
upon the throne, and to remove, as far as
possible, those circumstances which might
throw difficulty in the way of his youthful
government. The age of the prince was
ten years and about six months; his person
and countenance were, both at this time and
afterward, singularly beautiful and prepos-
sessing; and the love with which the whole

CHAP.
XLI.

1377.

Accession
of Ri-
chard II.

CHAP. nation regarded the memory of his father,
XLI.
1377. afforded him the happiest omen of a prosperous reign.

Proceed-
ings of
the king
of Cas-
tille.

The first care of the king of Castille was to reconcile himself to the city of London. This scene was contrived to be played in the presence of the new sovereign: a message was dispatched to the mayor and citizens, expressing the desire of the king that his uncle and his good subjects of the metropolis should be in harmony, and that for this purpose certain of the magistrates should repair to court; Richard represented the character of the mediator; and, after a parley, John of Gaunt conferred the kiss of peace upon each of the persons composing the city deputation^a. This conciliatory measure was followed by the release of sir Peter Delamare from his confinement, and the grant of an ample and unlimited pardon under the privy seal to the bishop of Winchester^b.

^a Walsingham and Stow, ad ann.

^b Rymer, Tom. VII, 1 Ric. 2, Jul. 30, 31.

The king of Castille next undertook the business of the royal coronation. It was celebrated on the twenty-fifth day from the demise of the crown; and, notwithstanding this expedition, it has been remarked as perhaps the most magnificent which occurs in our history. A council being summoned for the purpose, John of Gaunt made his appearance before them, and claimed, as earl of Leicester, to officiate as seneschal, or high steward, of England at the approaching solemnity; as duke of Lancaster, to bear in procession, by himself or his deputy, the principal sword, called *Curtana*; and as earl of Lincoln, to carve the meat at the king's table^c. These claims having been admitted, he in the character of seneschal, held a court of claims to adjust the similar pretensions of the nobility and gentry who, according to the modes of the feudal system, demanded in right of their fiefs to perform different menial services on the ensuing occasion^c.

CHAP.
XLI.1377.
Coronation.

^c Appendix, No.

CHAP.
XLI.

1377.

John of Gaunt, as seneschal, and lord Percy (on this occasion created earl of Northumberland), as earl marshal, conducted the procession, as it moved from the Tower to Westminster Hall; and it was remarked that they demeaned themselves with the utmost graciousness and courtesy to the citizens and spectators, very differently from the insolence which they adopted, or more probably which had been imputed to them, at the late convocation at St. Paul's^d. After the solemnity was concluded, the king of Castille delivered in the particulars of the festival in writing to the chancery, in order to their being duly enrolled^e.

Retirement
of the
king of
Castille.

Thus far John of Gaunt appears to have taken the whole of the concerns of government upon himself; and no one attempted to control him; or to dispute the propriety of his conduct. The business of the coronation however was no sooner finished, than

^d Walsingham, ad ann.

^e Rymer, ubi supra, Jul. 15.

he appeared before the king in council, and demanded leave to retire to his castle of Kenelworth, declaring his resolution to have no share in the future government. Meanwhile he added, that he should at all times be ready, whenever the king thought proper to send for him, to undertake any service of which he was capable for his sovereign and country^f. The earl of Northumberland also resigned his staff of marshal of England.

CHAP.
XLI.

1377.

The views by which the king of Castille was actuated on this occasion are easily conceived. He was the person to whom, according to the rules of perhaps every monarchy in Europe, the regency, during the minority of the young king, ought to have devolved. He was versed in affairs, a prince of great opulence, of considerable ability, and whose personal interference might be expected to have much weight and importance. It was natural to suppose that the administration of government would be stronger, more able to

Motives
upon
which it
was
founded.

^f Walsingham, ad ann.

C H A P. inspire foreign powers with respect, to keep
XLI.

down the turbulence of an untamed aristocracy, and to deliver the functions of the monarchy unimpaired to the young king hereafter, by being placed in the hands of John of Gaunt, than by being disposed of in any other way.

1377.

His enemies numerous.

On the other hand every kind of base and malignant artifice had been employed to fix upon him a general odium and aversion. He had been represented as a person of the haughtiest nature and the most despotic principles of conduct, dark, insidious and crafty, boundless in ambition, and unscrupulous in his choice of means for gratifying it. He was accused of aspiring to the crown, and poison was familiarly mentioned as one of his expedients for that end. He unquestionably was a man of quick and tempestuous passions, and by yielding to their vehemence had made himself many enemies. Several of the old nobility, and several enterprising adventurers in the science of government, conceived that they should be proscribed, and their views rendered abortive, under the sagacious and

dignified government of the king of Castille. CHAP.
XLI.
 The whole church establishment was rendered 1377.
 hostile to him by his patronage of the person
 and doctrines of Wicliffe. Libels against
 him had been disseminated with unsparing
 industry ; and, whatever were his real merits,
 a multitude of his countrymen were at this
 time persuaded to regard him as prone to ir-
 ritation at the most trivial offences, and brutal
 in his resentments.

It might be supposed to be doubtful, whe- Disadvant-
ages he
must have
encoun-
tered as
regent.
 ther, pursued by all this misrepresentation,
 and thus rendered obnoxious to his country-
 men, his government would be successful ;
 and still more whether he was bound, in
 justice to his nephew and his native isle, to
 make the experiment. As a private person, Advantage-
ousness of
his situa-
tion as a
private in-
dividual.
 it would not be doubted that he was the first
 in the kingdom ; he was a man of a liberal
 mind, of just principles, of uncommon talents
 and experience. So circumstanced, and so with regard
to public
benefit,
 endowed, his occasional interference on mo-
 mentous occurrences could not fail to have
 great weight ; his very presence and in-
 spection, though not within the verge of the

CHAP.
XLI.

1377.

court, would check the excesses of the ambitious ; and the motives of his conduct, he thought, could not be misinterpreted. Might he not be of more use to his country, appearing thus as a bystander, than if he took the reins of government into his own hands ?

and to his
private
interest.

As to his private interest in the case, this would not admit of a question. He had long enough managed the affairs of the nation, for this object to have lost the charms of novelty in his eyes. He had now an honourable occasion afforded him to retire. If he assumed the office which fell to him as it were by the right of his birth, he must expect to occupy an uneasy and precarious situation. He would be pursued with malignity and misrepresentation ; his purest services misconstrued ; a thousand cabals and conspiracies formed against him ; the rising power of the popular branch of the government employed for his ruin ; and perhaps the constitution of his country wounded for the sake of injuring him. As a retired individual, he had every means of gratification, of dignity, and of

public importance. His wealth was unrivalled, his mind was stored with various knowledge, and he was surrounded by friends, zealous in their attachment, of the greatest eminence, and the most distinguished talents. Who would not prefer such a retirement, to the functions of a regency, difficult at the best, and peculiarly inauspicious under the circumstances of his country?

CHAP.
XLI.

1377.

Thus it was then that John of Gaunt formed to himself a system of political conduct, from the commencement of his nephew's reign, which distinguishes him perhaps from every other conspicuous character that flourished during that turbulent period. He resolved to accept no place in the council of regency, and no share in the actual administration of public affairs. Yet the sentiment of his life was loyalty, an affectionate and unalterable attachment to the youth who had been bequeathed to his protection by his illustrious father and brother, and whom the course of descent had placed in the station of first magistrate of his native country. Perhaps he carried this principle to excess, particularly

His loyalty
and at-
tachment
to Ri-
chard.

CHAP.

XLI.

1377.

in the last years of Richard, when he allowed his name and countenance to be employed to sanction the king's bloody revenge against his junior uncle, Thomas of Woodstock, and the partisans who adhered to him. In every vicissitude of public affairs, in every shock of the rude and furious parties which were engendered in this period, he was to be found in his proper station, a supporter of the throne; and, if any thing bold and criminal was attempted against the unhappy sovereign, the perpetrators chose their occasion for that purpose, when John of Gaunt was absent from the realm.

His retire-
ment con-
demned.

It must be admitted however that he was deficient in energy of character. His natural qualifications and circumstances were precisely those of the man who should have saved his nephew from the calamities of his reign, from the corruption of flatterers and the animosity of relentless foes; and his abilities were sufficient for that purpose. If Richard II. perished miserably at the early age of twenty-two, this must in part be imputed to the king of Castille. The calumnies of his enemies he

should have despised ; he might have lived so as to render them pointless and contemptible. He did not use, as he might have done, for the prosperity of England the advantages which nature and fortune put into his hands. His temper was too mild ; it did not qualify him to stand up with sufficient fortitude and proud indifference, against the assaults of adversaries, and the obstacles which were industriously thrown in his course. He was for a moment fierce, animated and resentful ; but this state of mind did not continue. It was a feeling more of soreness from calumniated truth, than of firm and strenuous resistance from unassailable rectitude.

CHAP.
XLI.

1377.

John of Gaunt having retired, a council of regency was appointed five days after the coronation, consisting of the earl of March, the bishop of London, lord Latimer, and nine others^s. Edmund of Langley earl of Cambridge, and Thomas of Woodstock now

Council of
regency.

^s Rymer, ubi supra, Jul. 20.

CHAP. created earl of Buckingham, brothers of the
 XLI.
 1377. king of Castille, by whom he was entirely
 loved, imitated his conduct, and withdrew
 from all share in the administration. It seems
 to have been judged reasonable and decent
 not to include the bishop of Winchester in
 the king's continual council.

Parliament. Richard's first parliament met on the thir-
 teenth of Octoberⁿ; and their proceedings
 tend strongly to confirm the wisdom and pro-
 priety of the king of Castille's conduct in the
 part he had chosen. The house of commons
 immediately elected sir Peter Delamare, the
 leader of the factious and indecent measures
 of the preceding year, to be their speaker.
 They revived the prosecution against Alice
 Perrers, and pronounced sentence upon her
 of banishment and confiscation. In the fol-
 lowing year however this lady became the
 wife of lord Windsor, and obtained from
 parliament a reversal of the proceedings
 against her. The house of commons also

Second
 council of
 regency.

petitioned the other branch of the legislature, to appoint certain persons of divers classes, able, diligent and careful, to be of the king's continual council, and to act jointly with the great officers of state. The former committee of regency was accordingly superseded, and sixteen counsellors appointed in their stead, comprising for the most part the same persons, with the omission of lord Latimer, but including several of the zealous partisans of the king of Castille. The session of parliament closed after a duration of five weeks.

It has already been mentioned that the truce between England and France expired on the first of May. The new reign therefore commenced in a state of war. The great object of contention between the two countries appears to have been Calais. Charles V. looked with an observing eye upon the state of his neighbour kingdom; he was well informed of its intestine divisions and weakness. He thought the commencement of the reign of a minor sovereign, a minority committed for the most part to the experiments of an audacious faction, afforded him every

CHAP.
XLI.

1377.

WAR

CHAP. advantage for gaining this important post ;
XLI.

1377. and he determined to spare no effort to avail himself of it. Accordingly a considerable fleet was fitted out immediately on the expiration of the truce ; and the coasts of Kent, Sussex and Hampshire were invaded, insulted and ravaged, in the first weeks of the new reignⁱ. At the same time the Scots were put in motion by his intrigues, and committed divers outrages upon the borders of England^k.

1378.
King of
Castille
com-
mander
in chief.

The regency thought this an occasion of sufficient emergency to call for the interference of the king of Castille. Whatever aspersions were propagated against him in a civil capacity, all men looked up to him as the most eminent military commander their country had to boast. He was accordingly appointed the king's lieutenant and captain general for the dominions of France, with full powers of superintendence, as well relative to civil administration, as to the military expeditions which might be fitted out against

ⁱ Rymer, Jun. 30 ; Jul. 2, 7. * Walsingham, ad ann.

that country¹. Walsingham says, that the regency confided to him the subsidies which had been voted for the prosecution of the war; but this is sufficiently contradicted by the circumstance that the parliament of the following year having questioned the proper application of the supplies, were referred by the executive government to John Philpot and William Walworth, receivers whom the parliament had appointed, for satisfaction^m.

CHAP.
XLI.

1378.

If England at this time laboured under some disadvantages, France was exposed to evils of scarcely inferior magnitude. It had been her internal divisions which had laid the foundation for the victories of Edward III. That kingdom was distributed into a number of fiefs, of such extent as to enable the holders of them almost individually to bid defiance

Cherburgh
and Brest
placed in
the hands
of the
English.

¹ Froissart, Tom. I, Chap. cccxxix. A commission to John of Gaunt, probably the counterpart of this, may be found in Rymer, 3 Ric. 2, Sep. 12.

^m Cotton, 2 Ric. 2.

CHAP. to the single power of the crown. The sove-
XLI.

1378.

reign of the whole country could no otherwise maintain his ascendancy, than by negotiating and temporising with the discordant passions and desires of his vassals. Two of these vassals had been especially aiding and confederate to the views of Edward III; the king of Navarre, who had a considerable part of Normandy under his dominion, and John de Montfort duke of Brittany. These potent lords had each of them been nearly stripped of their feudal dominions by the fortune of the war, and their miscarriages operated to prolong their fidelity to the English standard. The king of Navarre now put into our hands for a limited term the fortress of Cherburghⁿ, and the duke of Brittany the harbour of Brest^o, with the added condition in the latter instance, that, if the duke previously to the expiration of the term died without issue, the fortress was to revert in perpetuity to the crown of England. John of Gaunt was pro-

ⁿ Rymer, 2 Ric. 2, Aug. 1.

^o Ditto, 1 Ric. 2, Apr. 5.

bably the negotiator of these cessions; and his first office as commander in chief, was to enter into secure possession of them. CHAP.
XLI.
1378.

Having for this purpose sailed to the coast of Brittany, he endeavoured to avail himself of the occasion to obtain for De Montfort some part of his dukedom, and with this view sat down before the town of St. Maloes. But he was compelled by the constable Du Guesclin, after an obstinate struggle, to raise the siege, and retire ^p. The successes of the campaign therefore, exclusively of the cruises of different squadrons of the fleet under his command, which took a considerable number of the enemy's vessels destined for the annoyance of our coasts ^q, were principally confined to the acquisition of the two fortresses above-mentioned, an acquisition liable to be regarded in opposite points of view. They afforded a most convenient entrance into France, and in this way seemed to add splendour to the

^p Froissart, Tom. II, Chap. 21.

^q Walsingham, ad ann.

CHAP. national character, as well as to be of con-
 XLI.
 1378. siderable advantage in the further prosecution
 of the war. But on the other hand, in the
 present state of England, the further pro-
 secution of the war was not desirable: it had
 ceased to be pregnant with such striking
 events as those of Cressy and Poitiers, and
 was degenerating into a war of depredation;
 and the finances of the European govern-
 ments at this time were wholly inadequate to
 the burthen of maintaining so many insulated
 fortresses as we now possessed on the ad-
 versary's coast.

Chaucer re-
 appointed
 comptrol-
 ler of the
 customs.

Notwithstanding the resolution formed by
 the king of Castille, of not contending for
 the regency during the minority of his ne-
 phew, nor taking any share in the admini-
 stration of the civil government, he did not
 on that account neglect the interest of his
 friends and dependents. Chaucer in par-
 ticular experienced the sincerity of John of
 Gaunt's attachment in this point. The con-
 duct of affairs, as we have seen, was entirely
 in the hands of this prince during the first
 weeks of the new reign; and the renewal of

the grant to Chaucer of the office of comp-
troller of the customs is dated on the day after
that on which Edward III. expired^r. His
pension also was renewed under the new
king; and he at the same time received a
grant to a similar amount (twenty marks *per*
annum) in compensation of the patent of
Edward III, entitling him to a pitcher of
wine daily, to be received in the port of
London^s. It is observable that these last
provisions in favour of Chaucer are dated in
March and April of the present year, that is,
immediately after his patron having accepted
the office of lieutenant for conducting the
war in France.

CHAP.
XLI.

1378.

His pen-
sions.

Justice demands that we should once more
notice in this place the forgeries of the article
of Chaucer in the Biographia Britannica. The
author of this article notices the two grants
last mentioned, and refers as his authority
respecting them to "Pat. 1 R. II, p. 13,"
and "Pat. 1 R. II, p. 19." There are no

Falsifica-
tions of
the Bio-
graphia
Britan-
nica.^r Appendix, No.^s Appendix, No.

CHAP.
XLI.

1378.

such rolls. The terms, "part the thirteenth," and "part the nineteenth," are absurd to any person accustomed to consult the records in the Tower. The record of the patents of any one year sometimes consists of a single roll, frequently of two rolls, which in that case are indorsed Parts I. and II, and I believe never exceed three. The grants to Chaucer of the present year are first mentioned by the author of the Life prefixed to Urry's Edition; but the biographer does not specify the source from which he drew his information. There is in fact no record existing relative to them, or none which has yet been brought to light, except the patent of the eleventh year of Richard II. in which they are pretty fully recited^t, permitting Chaucer to resign these grants in favour of another. This patent is imperfectly printed in a subsequent page of the Life in Urry's Edition. But the writer of the article in the Biographia did not exactly understand this. Finding no official references

^t Appendix, No.

in the book from which he drew his information, he has thought proper to invent references of his own, thus giving his essay an appearance of accuracy to the casual reader, exciting disapprobation and contempt in the elaborate and informed, and poisoning, to the extent of his power, the fountains of historical knowledge, and the confidence which every reasonable man would desire to repose in the integrity of history.

CHAP.
XLI.

1378.

Mr. Speght has included in his account of the official minutes of this period relative to Chaucer, that “in the second yeare of Richard the second, The King tooke Geffrey Chaucer and his lands into his protection”; upon which statement he reasons in the following manner: “It is in record that twice or thrice he was employed in foraine countries: which if it be true, wel might the man be at such charges and expences, as he might stand in need of king Richard the seconds protection till he had better recouered him-

Supposed
grant of
protection
to Chau-
cer.

^u Edition, 1597: Life of Chaucer; his rewards.

CHAP.
XLI.

1378. selfe^x." Upon this argument of Mr. Speght, the coadjutor of Urry sagaciously remarks, that "it seems less probable that he expended most of his wealth in foreign embassies, than that they were the means whereby he acquired it;" thus adopting the incident affirmed by Mr. Speght, at the same time that he leaves this alleged embarrassment of Chaucer without a cause. The author of the article of Chaucer in the *Biographia Britannica* concludes from the whole, that Chaucer on the accession of Richard II. lost his place of comptroller of the customs; the contrary of which we have just shown from the records.

Mr. Speght is a writer of a very different class from the author of Chaucer's article in the *Biographia*, and is entitled to a very different treatment from every candid enquirer. His information is almost always sound, though his references are not accurate. We are indebted to him for much valuable information respecting our poet; and, in many

* Edition, 1597: *Life of Chaucer*, his service.

instances where his authority has been disputed, investigation has conspicuously tended to confirm it. There is not the slightest reason to impute to him, as to his modern successor, an intention to mislead. Yet on the other hand no such protection is on record as that which he describes; nor is it probable that Chaucer's circumstances were such in the second year of Richard, as to make the king's writ to protect him from his creditors in any way necessary. The materials of Speght's Life of Chaucer seem to have been furnished to him by another; perhaps by Robert Glover, who supplied him with the tree of Chaucer's genealogy. The solution therefore of the difficulty we are here considering is likely to be, that the minutes from which Speght wrote contained a reference to the patent of protection to Chaucer, 21 Ric. 2^y, of which there is no notice in Speght; and that he, either from carelessness of inspection,

CHAP.
XLI.

1378.

CHAP.
XLI.

or the imperfectness of the hand-writing before him, observed only the former of the two figures representing the year of the king's reign.

1378.

CHAP. XLII.

POEM OF CHAUCER, ENTITLED THE COMPLAINT
OF THE BLACK KNIGHT.

WE have seen the manner in which the character of the king of Castille was treated by his political competitors. It was in vain that he withdrew from all rivalry with them in the cabinet; this by no means tamed the violence of their assaults. The ecclesiastical members of this cabal feared and hated him for his patronage of Wicliffe; and the whole party were impressed with the feeling that, if he once became popular, their power would be to the last degree precarious.

The minute particulars of the scandals invented against him it is impossible for us to trace. Immediately on the meeting of the parliament of the preceding autumn, the com-

CHAP.
XLII.

1378.

The king
of Castille
complains
of the
commons.

CHAP.
XLII.

1378.

mons, according to a mode very frequent at this time with that branch of the legislature, required to have certain lords, whom they named, to confer with them upon public affairs ; and, at the head of the list which they formed, appeared the name of the king of Castille. When this list was presented in the upper house, the king of Castille rose, and desired to be exempted from the nomination ; assigning as the reason of his request, that the commons had slandered him in manner of treason^a. It is not easy to say to what particular measure this complaint alludes ; but the complaint itself sufficiently evinces the ill blood which existed between the parties. The lower house apologised, and undertook to justify themselves from the imputation, and the difference was quieted ; but the hostile feelings from which it had proceeded still remained.

Affair of
Hawley
and
Shakel.

An unfortunate affair occurred while John of Gaunt was absent in the campaign of

^a Cotton, 1 Ric. 2.

Britanny, which, in the present state of the public mind, was extremely injurious to his character and his fame. One of the prisoners made in the battle of the Black Prince at Najara, was the count of Denia, a Spanish nobleman. Prisoners, according to the rules of war at this time established, became the property of the persons to whom they had surrendered their swords, who were accustomed to look forward to the benefit to accrue to them from the payment of the ransom. The names of the captors in the present case were Robert Hawley and John Shakel. After some negotiation, the count was set at large, and suffered to proceed to Spain to procure the sum which had been agreed upon, his son remaining a hostage for the discharge of his engagements. Difficulties probably arose to the father, more than he had foreseen, in raising the amount of his ransom ; the whole question was suspended or neglected ; and the young nobleman resided for several years in England.

The affair was in this situation, when John of Gaunt was induced to advance a claim, as

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king of Castille, that this young gentleman, being his subject, should be placed at his disposal. We know not whether this was done by him for the sake of consistency, as pretending to the Spanish crown ; or whether he thought that, by the favour and attention he purposed to show to the noble prisoner, he should gain somewhat toward creating to himself a party in the kingdom, the throne of which he claimed. It would be inconsistent with his whole character, if we should conceive him to have been actuated by sordid motives : it would be dishonourable to him, if we should suppose he did not pledge himself that the captors, by complying with his demand, should sustain no loss in the matter of the ransom. Perhaps they were engaged in the political party which was so industrious in its hostility to John of Gaunt ; perhaps they were persuaded to thwart him, by some of the powerful leaders of this party. Whatever was their motive, they obstinately refused to comply ; and, the royal authority having been in vain employed to overcome their resistance, they were committed to the

Tower for contempt. During the campaign of John of Gaunt in France, they found means to escape from their confinement, and to take sanctuary in the church of Westminster Abbey. The place of their retreat being known, sir Allan Buxhal, constable of the Tower, together with lord Latimer and sir Ralph Ferrers, felt prompted by their attachment to John of Gaunt, to proceed to the abbey with a sufficient body of armed men for the purpose of taking away the fugitives by force. The same obstinacy displayed itself on their part in this as in the former instance. They resisted; the attack was made upon them near the great altar at the period of high mass; and Hawley, with one of the monks of the convent, was killed in the affray^b.

The story here related is rendered interesting to us by the circumstance that the young count of Denia, either as resisting the title of John of Gaunt to the Spanish crown,

^b Cotton and Walsingham, ad ann.

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it was disregarded: he was then summoned to give an account of his conduct before the council at Windsor; but he refused to obey^c.

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A parliament met at Gloucester in the autumn of the present year. From what passed in this assembly it may be inferred that the friends of the king of Castille were more powerful here than in the first parliament of Richard. The chancellor in the speech with which he opened the session, among the different objects which he pressed upon their attention, recommended that they should make provision for the more effectual suppression of false rumours and slanders against persons in high station whether in church or state. The consequence of this recommendation was the passing the celebrated statute of *Scandalum Magnatum*, by which it is particularly provided that persons propagating such rumours shall be committed to prison, there to remain till they have produced him with whom the slander ori-

Statute of
Scandalum Magnatum.

^c Walsingham, ubi supra.

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Unpopu-
larity and
misfor-
tunes of
the king
of Castille.

ginated^d. This statute is understood to have been framed to conciliate the king of Castille; and, in the ignorance which as yet existed respecting the true principles of policy with regard to toleration and the freedom of speech and of writing, it does not merit to be considered as an indication of any illiberal propensity in his mind, if he were persuaded to regard the measure with complacency.

The misrepresentations uttered against John of Gaunt went on in uninterrupted progress, till they not only interfered with his public usefulness, but involved him in the most serious evils and dangers both as to property and life. It was owing to this cause that his palace of the Savoy was demolished in the insurrection of 1381, his family obliged to fly with the utmost precipitation, and himself to take refuge in Scotland, with the government of which he had just concluded a truce. It was owing to this cause that, when his nephew had assumed the reins of

^d Statutes at Large: 2 Ric. 2, Stat. 1, cap. 5.

government, a conspiracy was formed by a set of unprincipled courtiers, to which Richard appears to have lent his support, to bring him to a public and ignominious trial, on an accusation of having contrived to destroy the king, and to usurp the crown.

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I have been inclined to imagine that Chaucer's poem, entitled the Complaint of the Black Knight, was written on occasion of the atrocious aspersions endured by John of Gaunt, and intended as a vindication of his untainted loyalty. The idea must be allowed to be vague, and incapable of being sustained by any demonstrative argument: yet it may not, whatever may be the ultimate decision of the question, prove an unamusing speculation, or unillustrative of the history and political state of England at this time, to consider the presumptions by which a certain degree of probability may be given to this construction of the poem.

Complaint
of the
Black
Knight.

The author of the Life of Chaucer prefixed to Urry's edition mentions its having been conjectured that the Complaint of the Black Knight was written for John of Gaunt

CHAP. during his courtship of the princess Blanche.
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connected
with the
history of
John of
Gaunt.

There are several reasons that may persuade us that John of Gaunt is the hero of this poem. The scene is laid in Woodstock Park. We have the same expression defining the scene here, as in the Parliament of Birds.

—At the last I founde a little weie
Toward a parke, enclosed with a wall,
In compace rounde; and by a gaté small
Who so that would he frelie mighten gone
Into this parke *ywalled with grene stone*:

ver. 38.

a circumstance which we may suppose employed to indicate that the person here spoken of by the appellation of the Black Knight, was a member of the royal family.

The hero appears to have been a warrior. Enumerating his merits, all of which had been requited with ingratitude, the poet says,

^e Preface, Appendix C, note e.

Peril of dethe, neither in se ne lande,
 Hunger ne thurst, sorowe ne sykénesse,
 Ne gret ^femprises for to take on hand,
 Shedding of blode, ne manful hardinesse,
 Ne ofte wounding at ^ssautés by distresse, —
 Al is for nought.

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ver. 415.

Again,

He was in sothe, without exepcion,
 To speke of manhode, one the best ^hon live, —
 For of his time, and of his age also,
 He proved was, ⁱ there men shuld have ado.

ver. 158.

The next line, in which he is spoken of as
 “One of the best ^ktherto of brede and
 length,” may be supposed expressly to allude
 to the person and stature of John of Gaunt.

But, though John of Gaunt be the hero
 of the poem, there seems to be no plausibility
 in the supposition that it relates to his court-

not related
 to his
 courtship
 of the
 princess
 Blanche.

^f undertakings, adventures.

^s assaults.

^h alive.

ⁱ in scenes of public and honourable action.

^k besides in size and stature.

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ship with the princess Blanche. The patron of Chaucer, as we have seen, was little more than nineteen years of age at the period of his marriage with Blanche. To say nothing of the absurdity of setting forth, as is here done, the testimonies of his military achievements, on the conception that he was still a stripling; this can scarcely be reconciled with such phrases as the following:

For I lov'd one ful longé¹ sythe agone,
ver. 917.

and

Til at the last the woful man arose
And to a lodge ywent there close beside,
Where al the May his custome was t'abide,
Sole to complainé of his painés kene
From yere to yere.

ver. 587.

These expressions are employed to describe the length of the hero's courtship. From

¹ time.

the poems certainly written upon the loves of John of Gaunt and the princess Blanche, we learn indeed that their courtship continued for twelve months. But it is not very natural to introduce a youthful prince of nineteen bewailing the years of hopeless love which he had passed.

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Add to this, that the principal topic of the poem is the unworthy and atrocious slanders which the hero had endured, and which operated to shut him out from the favour of his mistress. We know of no slanders to which John of Gaunt was exposed in his boyish years. And it is a little too much, gratuitously to assume a catalogue of this sort producing so distinguished an effect, merely for the sake of forcing the application of a poem to an event with which it will not naturally accord.

The subject of the Complaint of the Black Knight, stated without mystery or ambiguity, is the misfortune of a true lover, who has been unjustly aspersed to his mistress, and, she giving ear to his accusers, is driven to despair. It is undoubtedly foreign to the

Literal
subject of
the poem.

CHAP. ideas of modern criticism, to imagine that a
 XLII. political allusion lies concealed under this
 1378. garb. But, if we would justly comment
 upon the production of a distant age, we
 must transport ourselves in fancy to the
 period in which it was written, and bear in
 mind the tastes and partialities which then
 prevailed.

Taste for
 allegorical
 writing.

In the time of Chaucer almost every thing
 was allegory. Did the poet aim at describing
 the hazards and pains of love? He took for
 his nominal subject the plucking of a rose^m.
 Did he describe the courtship of two distin-
 guished lovers? The lady was an eagle,
 and the prince who addressed her became a
 male of the same speciesⁿ. Did he pen an
 epithalamium upon a royal marriage? He
 feigned a romantic tale of the gathering of
 apples, of a ship that would extend itself to
 any dimensions, of birds bearing miraculous
 seeds in their beaks, and of a lover and a
 lady who died, only that they might be sur-

^m Romaunt of the Rose.

ⁿ Parliament of Birds.

prisingly restored to life and happiness^o. CHAP.
 Other instances of a similar sort will occur XLII.
 in our further developement of Chaucer's 1378.
 works.

The principles of loyalty and of love, as Passion of
 understood in the remoter ages of Europe, love and
 were extremely similar. Love, as has already sentiment
 been mentioned, was a species of worship. of loyalty
 In the language of an eloquent writer of our com-
 own times, it was a "proud submission, a pared.
 dignified obedience, a subordination of the
 heart, which kept alive, even in servitude
 itself, the spirit of an exalted freedom^p." Love con-
 The knight viewed his mistress as belonging sidered
 to an other order of beings. He never on the
 questioned her resolutions; or thought of principles
 contesting the propriety of her conduct. of chi-
 No severity on her part fatigued, and no valry.
 caprice revolted him; he asked for her heart;
 and, unless he found reason to believe that
 his assiduities were hateful to her, he per-

^o Chaucer's Dream.

^p Burke, Reflections on the Revolution in France.

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sisted in his courtship, and never conceived himself entitled to precipitate her determination. She was the deity he adored ; she was the religion for which he fought and was ready to spill the last drop of his blood ; her safety he was to watch over with exhaustless vigilance, her injuries to avenge, and her reputation, whether for beauty or for honour, to assert and defend.

The great merit of the system of chivalry lay in a judicious employment of the passions of humility and pride. The lover was humble in the presence of his mistress, and did not allow himself to have a will disjoined from hers ; he was humble at the moment of his highest good-fortune and success, for he attributed every thing to her grace, and nothing to his own merit. On the other hand, he was never at a loss for materials to nourish his pride. He was proud of his constant services, his unalterable patience, his unconditional submission ; all those things which, superficially considered, were the most incompatible with the character of a knight and a soldier, became gratifying to his heart,

on account of the passion they spoke, and the object to which they were paid.

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Description
of loyalty.

Loyalty was a sentiment in a striking degree parallel to love. If the object of loyalty possessed qualities worthy of the sentiment, this to a true son of chivalry heightened the passion ; if it did not possess these qualities, he was proud to feel that he cultivated the virtue for itself, and wanted no extrinsic excitement. The man entertaining this sentiment, would gladly counsel, and thus promote the happiness of, his sovereign ; but he did not assume to control him. He looked upon him as the delegate of an overruling Providence, and on that account as sacred. No injuries could dissolve the solemn tie ; and, if treated in the most brutal, or the most iniquitous manner, the true loyalist placed his pride in endurance, and in thus showing that the public feeling was with him superior to every private consideration. The sovereign was the mysterious link by which the machine of human society was held together : all order, all security, the infinite portions of private virtue and unosten-

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tatious happiness dispersed in the unnoticed haunts of the community, depended upon his preservation: if the sacredness of his character were violated, every thing was thrown into confusion, and anarchy and violence and bloodshed universally reigned. The loyalist therefore, like the lover, placed his honour in the fidelity and entireness of his service, and thought no pollution he could incur of so deep and inexpiable a dye, as conspiracy or rebellion ^a.

The loyalty here spoken of was in the feudal times not without its limits. In these times there was much of the generous spirit of freedom, and of the rugged temper of independence. The feudal barons felt themselves little sovereigns, each in his bounded sphere, and did not hesitate on many occasions to hold a peremptory language to their chief. This was not however the pri-

^a The sublime spirit of an entire loyalty and non-resisting submission is admirably delineated in several of the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher, and particularly in the tragedy of Valentinian.

mitive genius of the feudal system. Fiefs were originally granted for a short term, and the tenant was considered merely as a steward cultivating his portion of land for the benefit of his lord. Every memorial was carefully employed to keep alive in his recollection his dependent and subordinate situation. Such was the primary idea of fines and reliefs; such was the homage that he vowed on his bended knees; and such the menial services, the performance of which was usually annexed as a condition or quit-rent to a fief. They were the services not of meanness, but implying a certain merit and rank in him who paid them; not of constraint, but affection. When the loyal and chivalrous spirit languished in the immediate tenants of the crown, it still continued undiminished in various classes of society. The villains, or unprivileged cultivators of the land, on the estate of a feudal baron, were ordinarily inspired with a passive sentiment of obedience and unbounded devotion to their chief. Still more the retainers, or immediate free-born attendants of the lord, continued to be ani-

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CHAP. mated with all the enthusiasm of attachment.
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This attachment was regularly to be found in persons of this class, from the retainers of him who held the most trivial fief, to those of the sovereign himself. They were frequently educated under his roof; they were fed at his board; and often the blood of their master flowed in their veins. John of Gaunt was inspired with this species of loyalty for Richard II: the affection of an uncle and a protector mixed itself with that of a subject and a servant; he felt for his illustrious family, for Edward III. and the Black Prince; he felt for the tranquillity and the character of his country; and all these sentiments impressing him at once, produced the conviction that, among the various principles of his public life, none should contend with, or presume to control, his loyalty for the inexperienced years of his kinsman and sovereign.

Youth,

The allegory which we have supposed Chaucer to have chosen in this instance, was rendered the more appropriate from the peculiar circumstances of the case. Richard II.

had reigned nearly ten years, before he was
 twenty years of age. The features and com-
 plexion of a blooming youth have a striking
 similitude to the charms and graces of the
 softer sex. The mature man feels the same
 ascendancy of corporeal and intellectual
 strength in the one case as in the other; a
 sentiment which, however varnished over and
 delicately kept from sight, is one of the
 most prevailing causes of that species of de-
 ference which the lover is accustomed to pay
 to his mistress. The youth has a claim upon
 us for the same forbearance and protection
 as the lady. He is to be defended from the
 rude blasts of the world, and not carelessly
 to be exposed to those hazards and difficulties
 which form the wholesome discipline of the
 man of riper age. If to this general catalogue
 of particular circumstances we add the sacred-
 ness which all communities acknowledge in
 the person of their first magistrate, we shall
 perceive the deference to be paid to the
 youthful king heightened to something of
 much the same nature as that which the

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and sacred
character
of Ri-
chard II.

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knight of ancient times paid to his mistress. John of Gaunt, who devoted himself for the welfare of his royal nephew, felt for him the same tenderness, the same anxiety, the same considerate forbearance of a stronger toward a frailer nature, as belong to the passion of love in its state of greatest purity and refinement.

His beautiful person and prepossessing manners.

There was one further circumstance in the case of Richard which gave to the form of allegory here employed perhaps a peculiar fitness in the conception of Chaucer. This prince is universally described to us as one of the most beautiful youths that was ever beheld; and from the portrait of him still existing in Westminster Abbey, however imperfect was the art of painting in that age, connoisseurs have inferred that his person was admirably formed, and his features cast in a mould of the most perfect symmetry. His appearance and manner were highly pleasing; and it was difficult for any one to approach him without being prepossessed in his favour. The eulogium therefore which

Chaucer inserts in this poem as of a mistress, might with scarcely any modification be applicable to the sovereign:

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For bounté, beauté, shape, and ^r semelihede,
For prudence, wit, and passingly fairenesse,
For benigne porte, glad chere, with ^s lowly-
hede.

ver. 499.

The principal part of the poem consists of the soliloquy of its hero, who bewails his misfortune in having lost the favour of the person he loved, through the malice of slanderous tongues. The soliloquy is interspersed with the strongest professions of his fidelity and inviolable attachment to the object he adores. Thus in a passage already referred to:

Ardent and
unalter-
able at-
tachment
of the
Black
Knight.

For I lov'd one ful longé. ^t sythe agone
With all mine herte and body and ful might,
And, ^u to be ded, my herté can not gone

^r seemliness, comeliness.

^s lowliness, modesty.

^t time.

^u though I should die for it.

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From his behestes, ^xbut hold that he hath
hight;

Though I be banished out of her sight,
And by her mouth ^ydampned that I shall dey,
To my behestes yet I wil ^zer obey.

ver. 317.

And again, in the conclusion of the soliloquy:

For her againest shal I never strive
In worde ne werké, plainly I ne may,
For ^alever I have ^bthen to be alyve
To dye sothly, ^cand it be to her ^dpaye,
Ye though it shuldé be this samé day;
Or whan that ever her lysted to devise;
Sufficeth me to die in your servise.

And God! (that know'st the thought of every
wight,

Right as it is, in every thing maist se)
Yet, er I die, with al my fullé myght
Lowly I pray, to graunten unto me,
That ye, lady, godely, faire, freshe and fre,

^x so as not to hold (perform) what it has promised.

^y condemned. ^z ever, always. ^a rather.

^b than. ^c if. ^d satisfaction.

Which onely ^e sle me for defaute of routhe,
^e Or that I dyén, ye may knowe my trouthe.

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For that in sothe ^h inow suffiseth me,
ⁱ And she it know in every circumstaunce,
 And after I am wel ^j apaide that she,
 If that her lyst, of deth ^k to do vengeaunce
 Unto me that am under her lygeaunce;
 It ^l site me not her dome to disobeye,
 But at her ^m luste fulle wilfully to deye:

Withouten grutchinge or rebellion
 In wil or wordés, wholly I assente,
 Or any maner contradiction,
 Fully to be at her commaundément;
 And, if I dyén, in my testament
 My herte I sende and my spirite also,
 What so ever she lyste with hem to do:

And, ⁿ alder last, unto her womanhede
 And to her mercy me I recommaunde,

^e slay. ^f want of compassion, gentleness. ^g Ere.

^h enow, enough. ⁱ if. ^j content.

^k This particle is superfluous, and has probably crept into the text. Chaucer perhaps considered deth (dethé) as a dissyllable.

^l fts. ^m will, pleasure. ⁿ last of all.

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That lye nowe here betwixen hope and drede,
Abidinge plainly what she list commaunde;
For utterly this ne is no °demaunde:
Welcome to me, whilés me lasteth breth,
Ryght at her choise, ^p where it by lyfe or
deth.

And in this mater more what might I ^qsaïne,
Sith in her hand and in her wil is al,
Bothe lyfe and deth, my joye and al my
peine?

And finally my ^rhesté hold I shal,
Til my spirite, by destenye fatal,
Whan that her lysteth, fro my body ^swende:
Have here my trouth, and thus I make an
ende.

ver. 534.

Unkind-
ness and
severity
of his
mistress.

Another principal circumstance in the nar-
rative of this poem, is the displeasure con-
ceived against the hero by the mistress of his
affections. Thus,

Attourney there maye none admitted ben,

° question.

^p whether.

^q say.

^r behest, promise, resolution.

^s goes.

To excuse trouth, ne yet a worde to speke ;
 To faith or othe the judg^e ^tlyste not sene,
 There is no ^ugaine, but he will be ^xawreke.

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ver. 282.

And in another place,

And most of al for this I me complaine,
 That she hath joy to laughen at my paine,
 And wilfully she hath my deth ysworne.

ver. 448.

The speaker observes that it is one of the aggravations of the passion of love, that he whom Cupid has wounded, is compelled to sue to the individual who is the cause of all his suffering, for the cure.

Right thus fareth it nowe even by me,
 That to my foe, that gave my herte a wounde,
^yMote asken grace and mercy and pité,
 And namely there where none may be
 yfounde.

ver. 478.

^t deigns not to attend.

^y stop.

^x avenged.

^y Am compelled to ask.

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Lastly, the lover states it as a cruel addition
to his sorrows, that

min herte professed whilom was
For to be trewe with al my fullé myght
Onely to one, the whiché nowé, alas!
^z Of volunté, without any trespas,
Myne accusours hath taken unto grace,
And cherisheth hem, my deth to purchase.

ver. 297.

originating
in the un-
merited
calumnies
which had
been in-
vented
against
him.

Thus far the story is, for the most part,
only that obvious tale of love which every
poet is accustomed to rehearse. The most
ordinary versifier will tell us of a knight that
is constant and unbounded in his devotion,
and a lady cruel and inexorable in her treat-
ment of his passion. What distinguishes the
Complaint of the Black Knight from the
current of love-tales, is that the hero of this
poem has fallen under the displeasure of his
mistress in consequence of the unmerited
calumnies which had been invented against

* Voluntarily, arbitrarily.

him : nor is it in the least probable that John of Gaunt, in his courtship of the princess Blanche, was exposed to any such incident.

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Before Chaucer enters directly upon his subject, it is thus that he prepares his auditors for the tale he has to relate :

And if that any nowe be in this place,
That feleth in love ^a breninge or fervence;
Or hindered were to his ladies grace
With falsé tongés, that with pestilence
^b Sle trewé men, that never did offence
In worde nor dede, ne yet in ^c her entent;
If any soche be here nowe in present, —

ver. 205.

The style in which the hero's misfortune is described in the body of the poem, seems much too grave for a love-tale, and is singularly appropriate to the political history of John of Gaunt during this period.

The style
in which
they are
spoken of,
too grave
for a
love-tale.

Falsly accus'd, and of his ^d fone forjугed

^a burning.

^b Slay.

^c their.

^d foes.

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Unfortunate
destiny of
true
lovers,
and pro-
sperous
success of
the dis-
loyal.

Withouten answer, while he was absent,
He damned was.

ver. 276.

A principal source of the anguish which we may suppose John of Gaunt to have felt while he was under the displeasure of Richard, was from the consciousness that, while he, the best support of the throne, and the truest friend of him who sat upon it, was discarded with obloquy, the heedless and misjudging monarch gave all his confidence to foolish and profligate courtiers, persons whose suggestions directly led to the most fatal calamities, and who, while they pretended the utmost attachment to their patron, thought only of their own private and sinister purposes. Chaucer, to express this sentiment (if we are right in our explanation of the poem), has allegorically introduced a catalogue of true lovers whose passion was frustrated, and whose end was unfortunate; contrasting it with the perfidious and specious pretenders (the names of whom are principally taken from Ovid's Epistles), whose pursuits were crowned with success.

For ever ^esithens that the worlde began,
 Who so lyste loken, and in story rede,
 He shall aye finden that the trewé man
 Was put abacke,——

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ver. 324.

But ^flesingoures with ^sher base flatterie,
 Through ^sher falshede, and with ^sher dou-
 blenesse,
 With talés newe, and many a fained lie,
 By false semblaunt, and counterfeit hum-
 blesse,
 Under colour depainte with stedfastnesse,
 With fraude covert under a pitous face,
 Accepted be nowe ^hrathest unto grace;
 And can hem selven nowe best magnifie,
 With fained porte, and ^sher presumpcion;
 They ⁱhauncen ^sher cause with false ^ksur-
 quidrie,
 Under menyng of double' entencion,
 To thinke one thing in ^sher opinion,
 And saye another', to set hem selve alofte,
 And hinder trouthe.

since. ^f liars, hypocrites. ^s their. ^h soonest.

advance. ^k consequence, ostentation.

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Critical de-
fects of
the poem

Taking for granted that the design of Chaucer in this poem has been truly unfolded, it must be admitted that there is a species of weakness and effeminacy inherent in the plan, more correspondent to the general idea of Spenser's vein, than to that of the poetry of our elder and patriarch bard. In describing loyalty under the image of the passion of love, something of the free, energetic and awful qualities with which it might be adorned, must necessarily be lost: and still more, in treating of the aspersions by which the statesman was harassed and controled, a plaintive style of self-pity is inevitably introduced, which ill suits with the masculine vigour we require in a public character, or with the generous disdain we are accustomed to connect with the name of John of Gaunt. The general idea itself of representing a grander, under the image of a meaner and more trivial, topic, is frigid, unnatural, and repulsive to a genuine taste. We are not however from this consideration entitled to make any deduction against the probability of the Complaint of the Black Knight being an

allegorical poem. Allegory was the taste of the day ; and half the productions of Chaucer's earlier and middle age were of this class.

CHAP.
XLII.

1378.

On the other hand, if such be the true interpretation of the poem, we may conceive that Chaucer regarded it with no common degree of complacency. He was employed in it vindicating his generous patron and faithful friend from a series of the foulest and most unmerited aspersions that were ever cast upon an innocent and honourable character. He was erecting a perennial monument to his integrity, his sincerity and his patriotism. Allegory, as being a species of composition nearly obsolete, is less obvious to our apprehension, than it was to that of the polite scholars of the fourteenth century. But, reasoning upon general principles of human nature, we may venture to affirm that Chaucer did not exactly anticipate this change. He regarded himself as penning an historical record of the views of the celebrated personage to whom his poem relates, not only more durable than the malignant calumnies of

Important
purpose
which it
was de-
signed to
answer.

received
-and to
-as the
-and the
-and the
-and the

CHAP.
XLII.

1378.

Illustration
from the
House of
Fame.

Specimen
of Chau-
cer's de-
scriptive
powers.

his enemies, but which perhaps might outlast public edifices and public institutions, all of mortal creation that his eye surveyed, even the venerable foundations at Oxford and at Winchester which were laid by the father of the mischiefs he deplored.

We have seen Chaucer, in his poem of the House of Fame, treating public estimation and notoriety with a pointed degree of indifference and contempt. This forms a link of connection between that work and the performance we are here considering. It is probable that he composed his House of Fame under the quick and poignant feeling of the arbitrary nature of popular applause, as exemplified in the history of the king of Castille. A further parallel circumstance in this poem to the House of Fame, is that the author here¹, as in that production^m, complains that he is under some extraordinary depression of mind.

This composition, like all the original per-

¹ ver. 17—21.

See Chap. XXXVII, p. 29.

formances of Chaucer, is stamped with those lively, spirited and cheerful views of nature, which form one of the signatures of his genius. This is conspicuous in the landscape with which the poem opens. His walk begins,

CHAP.
XLII.

1378.

When that the mistie vapour was agone,
And clere and fairé was the ⁿ morownyng,
The dewe also like silver in shynyng
Upon the leves, as any baumé swete;
Till firie Titan, with his ^o persaunt hete,

Had dried up ^p the lustie licour newe
Upon the herbés in the grené mede,
And that the floures of many divers hewe
Upon her stalkés ^a gonen for to sprede,
And for to ^r splaie out her levés in ^s brede
^t Againe the sonne, ^u golde burned in his spere,
That doune to hem ycast his bemés clere.

ver. 24.

ⁿ morning. ^o piercing. ^p the dew. ^a began.
^r unfold their leaves. ^s breadth. ^t Against.
^u shining like burnished gold.

CHAP.
XLII.

The poet presently finds a convenient shelter
from the heat, the habitation of birds,
1378.

Whiche, on the braunches both in plain and
vale,

So loude ysang, that all the wode yrong,
Like it should shiver into peces smale.

ver. 44.

And the scene is made complete by a rivulet,
exquisitely described,

That had his course, as I could wele behold,
Under a hill, with quické stremes and colde,

ver. 76.

CHAP. XLIII.

DEATH OF CHARLES V.—STATE OF SOCIETY IN
EUROPE. — INSURRECTION OF THE COMMON
PEOPLE.—UNFORTUNATE EVENTS WHICH BEFEL
THE KING OF CASTILLE.

THE war in France during the immediately following years was marked with few considerable events. Charles V. adopted with regard to Brittany the same policy which he had employed with success in the case of Aquitaine; declared the feudal tenant to have forfeited his title, and promulgated an act annexing his principality for ever to the crown^a. But the issue of the proceeding was very different from what it had been in

CHAP.
XLIII.

1379.

Escheat of
the duchy
of Brit-
anny.

De Mont-
fort re-
called by
his sub-
jects.

^a Henault, Abrégé Chronologique de l'Histoire de France,
ad ann.

CHAP. the former instance. The lords of France
XLIII.

1379.

were jealous of such an addition to the power of their sovereign; the inhabitants of the province had been accustomed to look up to their immediate chief, resident among them, and desired to continue to do so. In the affair of Aquitaine the retaining their particular lord seemed less a fresh symbol of the independence of the people, than a submission to a foreign yoke; but there was no such unpleasing circumstance attending the case of Brittany. Accordingly the inhabitants no sooner heard of the decree that had been passed, than they joined to recal their native lord^b. He was supported in his return by Thomas of Woodstock earl of Buckingham, youngest brother of John of Gaunt, who gained considerable reputation in this campaign^c. But De Montfort was now weary of the vicissitudes he had experienced, and saw before him the means of repose and security. The Bretons loved their native prince, but

1380.

Campaign
of the earl
of Buck-
ingham.

Death of
Charles V.

^b Froissart, Chap. xlv.

^c Ditto, Chap. liii, liv. lv.

hated the English ; and Charles V, under whose direction the decree of forfeiture had been issued, died toward the close of the campaign. Du Guesclin expired two months before the death of his sovereign. The successor, Charles VI, was a minor nearly of the same age as Richard II ; and De Montfort found little difficulty in obtaining, from the regency which conducted the government of France, a revocation of the sentence of forfeiture which had been pronounced against him. The negotiation to that effect was carried on in silence ; and, when avowed, the English found themselves obliged indignantly to withdraw from the territory of the ally who had abandoned their cause^d.

Charles V, as well as his contemporary and competitor, Edward III, was decisively a friend to literature and to men of letters. He was fond of reading ; and it was difficult to present him with any thing which he valued more than books. John, his father, left a

CHAP.
XLIII.

1380.

and of Du
Guesclin.

De Mont-
fort de-
serts the
English
alliance.

Literary
character
of Charles
V.

^d Froissart, Chap. lxxv.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1380.

collection not exceeding twenty ; but Charles V. increased his library to nine hundred. It contained volumes of devotion, astrology, medicine, law, history and romance ; and the king was not more scrupulous in the constant use of his religious auxiliaries, than he was curious in the investigation of the occult sciences. He possessed indeed few of the classical writers in their original language ; not a copy of Cicero ; and, of the Latin poets, only Ovid, Lucan and Boethius. Translated into French, he however included in his collection Livy, Valerius Maximus, the Bible, and certain works of Aristotle and St. Austin^e. The versions from Aristotle were made by his special command^f.

The history of the reign of Richard II. is exceedingly imperfect. In his second year we find from the records the king of Castille constituted lieutenant of the marches of Scotland^g, and for the year following receiving a

^e Henault, ad ann.

^f Pasquier, Recherches de la France, Liv. VII, Chap. V.

^g Collins, ad ann,

fresh commission to act against Franceⁿ. Yet CHAP.
XLIII.
in neither of these years does he appear from 1380.
the historians to have exercised the powers
thus conferred upon him.

In the autumn of the present year however, King of
Castille
sent
against
the Scots.
he unquestionably proceeded upon a com-
mission to Scotland. We shall presently have
occasion to refer to the events of this ex-
pedition.

The government had now for upward of Council of
regency
discharg-
ed.
two years been nearly in the same hands, and,
as will always happen in the case of an oli-
garchical council temporarily administering
the affairs of a great nation, it continually
declined in respect to weight and popularity.
An expedient was now attempted for re-
medying this evil; but it proved, as might
well have been expected from the feebleness
of its character, wholly inadequate to the end.
It was imagined that the council of regency
was too numerous; and the commons, in the
beginning of this year, petitioned that it

ⁿ Rymer, 2 Ric. 2, Jun. 12.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1380.

might be dissolved, and the administration confided to the five great officers of state, the chancellor, treasurer, and keeper of the privy seal, together with the lords chamberlain and steward of the household, not to be removed but by address from the two houses of parliament¹.

Poll-tax.

In the year following, the evils which had been nursed and ripened in the nation ever since the epoch of the Good Parliament, broke out into a tremendous flame. The depredations which were committed upon our coasts, and the burning of our harbours, by the French cruisers, were events strongly contrasted with the successes of the brilliant years of Edward III, and were regarded by the English with great impatience and indignation. The system of taxation was yet in its infancy, and therefore required to be conducted with a cautious and a skilful hand. At the same time it unfortunately happened that the state of war in which England had

¹ Cotton, 3 Ric. 2.

so long been involved, called for copious supplies. The taxes imposed had, as we have seen, been a principal topic of complaint in the Good Parliament; and that assembly was inconsiderate enough to state it as their expectation that, at the end of an extensive and critical war, the public coffers should be full, without any additional burthens imposed upon the subject. Now that the individuals who had prompted the measures of the Good Parliament were in power, the evil was not diminished. The insufferable load of taxation was the subject of every day's complaint; and, a poll-tax of one shilling *per* head having been voted by the parliament which met in November 1380¹, this proved the occasion to one of the most terrible insurrections recorded in history.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1380.

The situation of the different governments of Europe was at this time exceedingly cri-

1381.
State of so-
ciety in
Europe.

¹ Cotton, 4 Ric. 2. The tax was higher than this sum upon the rich, and lower upon the poor, but this is named in the record as the average of the assessment.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

tical, and we have seen the convulsions which grew out of this circumstance in France, in the year immediately subsequent to the battle of Poitiers. The forms of magistracy now in existence had been the produce of a period of the utmost ignorance and oppression, when the mass of the inhabitants in every country had obtained no consideration. The great lords and holders of feudal tenures were powerful and fierce, and able to dictate to the sovereign to whom they yielded the external forms of superiority ; but the common people were universally in a state of servitude, and were transferred like stock with the estates on which they resided. An important change however had for some time been silently operating in society. In proportion as knowledge had been cultivated, and arts called into existence, a power had arisen in the community, independent of the feudal chieftains, and which rested for its foundation upon that opulence which is the fruit of industry. The commercial towns of Italy and Flanders make a considerable figure in the history of this period. We have seen the degree of im-

portance acquired by some of the citizens of our own metropolis^k. The house of commons, a new phenomenon in the English history, owed its existence to the rise of the towns on the one hand, and the reduction of the feudal tenures on the other, producing our burgesses and knights of the shires.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

But, though the forms of civil government had been gradually accommodating themselves to the new state of society, the change did not keep pace with the demands of the situation. Villainage, that is, a condition of the lower classes of the community, obliging them to afford their labour to their superiors without compensation, was at this time more general in England than in any other country of Europe^l. What the people had in darker ages and ruder times borne without murmuring, and regarded as the inevitable concomitant of their destiny, they now began to consider as the bitterest injustice. This was the period of the awaking of the human

Villainage.

^k Vol. I, Chap. I.

^l Froissart, Chap. lxxiv.

CHAP. mind. Prejudice was dying away ; super-
 XLIII.
 stition was relaxing its hold ; men began to

1381.

open their eyes, and examine their situation ; to enquire to what they were condemned, and of what they were capable. This was the era of the sacred doctrines of equality ; doctrines which, if temperately and seriously weighed, are fraught with inestimable benefits, but, if rashly, superficially and irreverently acted upon, are the plagues of mankind, involving their disciples in the most fearful calamity, and bringing discredit upon the principles of justice and truth. Unfortunately, it is this hasty and intemperate proceeding to which the mass of mankind are prone ; they catch fire from the glimpses of mental illumination, but do not allow it time to pervade the social system with its vivifying heat.

Decline of
 the feudal
 system.

It may be allowable in this place to digress to another circumstance belonging to the present state of society in Europe, which, though not so immediately connected with the insurrections of the present year, is necessary to complete our picture of the degrees

of civilisation and barbarism at this time prevailing. The feudal system, as has been CHAP.
XLIII.
1381. repeatedly observed, had undergone great dilapidations; a chief tenant of the crown was no longer that formidable sort of little monarch, which he had been under the Norman princes. Hence the smaller tenants in chief had found it necessary to cooperate for Representa-
tion. mutual advantage, and their feelings and interests had given a beginning to what are known by the appellation of the knights of the shires. Another expedient had risen out Retainers. of this situation, the introduction of liveries and retainers.

In the vigorous state of the feudal system each lord had been a magistrate and a judge on his domains, deciding upon the controversies or transgressions of his people according to his own ideas or caprice. When this system had fallen to decay, the immediate result was a fresh influx of anarchy and violence. For the purpose of resisting this evil, the smaller tenants of the crown were forward to resort to the greater; and the greater, who had also lost somewhat of their power, eagerly

CHAP. accepted the proffered reinforcement. Every
XLIII.

1381.

one, being by birth a gentleman, but by the vicissitudes of fortune deprived of the means of subsistence, and many whose situation was by no means equally forlorn, willingly put on the badge and coat of their more opulent neighbour, and acknowledged themselves in some sort members of his train: their appropriate appellation was that of retainers. In the establishment of this new species of relation was included a compact, that the parties should maintain each other's quarrel, and unite in resisting any incroachment or aggression that should be made upon either. From the reign of Richard II. to that of Henry VII. inclusive, many laws were made to repress this species of confederacy.

It is easy to see with how much confusion and disorder this institution was pregnant. Those concerned in it looked not to any general species of jurisprudence, common to the whole realm, or approved by the universal feelings of mankind, but to the approbation or acquittal of their confederacy and its leader. Rapes, murders, pillages and extortion, were

the common complaints which grew out of this species of society. All was violence; nothing was secure. It was a frequent practice of the great lord, by the awe of his power, or the number of his dependents, to wrest from the king a pardon of the offences of those who composed his retinue. The walled towns, the abodes of opulence and traffic, were the only places in which any thing like a regular police prevailed. The open country was too often a scene of robbery to the traveller, and of insolent tyranny or unresisting oppression to the settled inhabitant. We may well at first sight be surprised, that sentiments so gallant, manners in several respects so delicate and refined, an intellect so cultivated, and so much of literature, fancy and taste, as marked this period, could subsist in the immediate neighbourhood of such a degree of barbarism, insecurity and insolence.

The signal to the present insurrection is said to have been an insult committed by one of the collectors of the poll-tax, upon the daughter of a tyler, of the town of

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

Insurrec-
tion.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

Dartford in Kent^m. The law prescribed a certain age, supposed to be the age of puberty, as the period at which the tax should begin to be assessible; and a dispute having arisen between the tax-gatherer and the father, the former had recourse to a very indecent expedient for ascertaining the girl's years. The mechanic felt like a parent; and, with the tool with which he happened to be working at his trade, deprived the offender of existence. Immediately the people of the vicinity, already ripe for revolt, flew to arms; the flame spread with rapidity from village to village, and from county to county; and in a few days one hundred thousand men were assembled on Blackheath, four miles from London^m. The tumult was wholly unforeseen, and no power existed adequate to oppose the flood of its violence. The insurgents immediately entered the metropolis, burned down the Temple and the Hospital

The in-
surgents
at Black-
heath.

enter Lon-
don.

^m Walsingham, ad ann.

of the knights of St. John of Jerusalem, set open all the prisons, and possessed themselves of the Tower of London. Feeling at present that they were superior to restraint, they determined to enforce the most rigid principles of equality. To prove that they were not ashamed of the meanness of their origin, they assumed feigned names, expressive of their former mechanical occupations; such as Wat Tyler, Hob Carter, Tom Miller and Jack Straw. Nothing could exceed the haughty demeanour of their leaders, the intoxication attendant upon their brief prosperity, and the insolence with which they treated the exalted in station or in birth;—neither the pride imputed to John of Gaunt, nor that actually indulged by Courteney bishop of London. Tyranny marked their proceedings, and their footsteps were tracked with blood. Their principal scenes of summary execution were the western extremity of Cheapside, and Tower Hill. Every man connected in any way with the practice of the law was particularly the object of their proscription. Some they put to death because they could not

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

Their ex-
cesses.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

murder the
lord trea-
surer and
the arch-
bishop of
Canter-
bury.

speaking English, and others because the implements of writing were found in their houses. They came to the resolution of destroying all records, that no vestige might remain of their former slavery, but all things begin anew. They pounded all jewels or gold plate in a mortar, and cast the dust into the Thames, to express their animosity to the accumulation of wealth. Two of their unhappy victims, mangled and beheaded on Tower Hill, were Simon Sudbury archbishop of Canterbury, lord chancellor, and sir Robert Hales prior of the knights of St. John of Jerusalem, lord treasurer of the realm. A third immolated in the same butchery, was a Franciscan Friar, whose name appears to have been William Appledore, a man consummately skilled in natural philosophy, and a particular favourite of John of Gaunt. Having overtaken the dowager princess of Wales on her road from Canterbury, they forced upon her their brutal kisses, to evince that all distinctions of rank were at an end.

Wat Tyler. Wat Tyler, the leader of the Kentish insurgents, declared that henceforward there

should be no law in England but what came from his mouth ; and Litster, a dyer of Norwich, who commanded another innumerable band from that quarter of the island, and styled himself king of the commons, found a savage amusement in compelling the men of rank he encountered, some, to carve his dishes, and others, to be cup-bearers at his royal board, after the manner of chivalry.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

John Litster.

Nothing can be more similar in many respects than the demeanour of the lower classes of people in all ages of the world in their successful insurrections. The arrogance of Wat Tyler is the precise counterpart of the arrogance of Massaniello of Naples in 1646 ; and the insurgents of England in the fourteenth century repressed by the most rigorous examples all instances of theft and privy conveyance among their fellows, in the same manner as was practised in the early scenes of violence and devastation in the French revolution. Nor did some of the petitions of the revoltors, and the sermons of John Ball, their celebrated preacher, fall short, in strength of thinking, and that eloquence which finds a

Their rigorous police.

Their energetic lessons of equality.

John Ball.

CHAP. responsive chord in every human heart, of
 XLIII. the best productions of that nature brought
 1381. forth by the memorable event last alluded to.

Behaviour
 of Ri-
 chard II.

On this occasion, particularly in one critical scene, Richard II, aged only fourteen years and six months, showed himself the genuine offspring of Edward III. and the Black Prince, and afforded the happiest promise for his future life. He had passed by water to meet the Kentish rebels at Greenwich, but had been dissuaded, in consequence of their furious gestures and tumultuous demeanour, from trusting himself among them^a. He had proceeded to Mile End to meet the rebels from the Eastern coast; had granted them charters of manumission, or liberty to refuse to afford their labour where they were to receive no compensation (for this was the thing they principally desired); and successfully dispersed themⁿ. But the decisive scene of this extraordinary contention was acted in Smithfield. Hither Richard repaired, at-

Conference
 in Smith-
 field.

^a Knighton, ad ann. Froissart, Chap. lxxvi.

tended by a considerable body of nobles and knights, to meet Wat Tyler and the main body of the insurgents. The king's party and that of the rebels were drawn up in martial array facing each other. Messengers passed and repassed, negotiating the disputes which arose between the contending authorities. Three several charters were successively dispatched from the king to the head of the populace, and were all pronounced inadmissible. It was supposed by many to be the object of the insurgents to draw out the parley till night, that under favour of the darkness they might renew their devastations in a mode of still superior violence. Tyler however, assuming an air of anger at his repeated disappointments, declared his resolution to confer with the king in person; and, ordering his party to halt, and putting spurs to his horse, he rode into the midst of the band of nobles and knights who surrounded the king. Having come so near, that his horse's head touched the crupper of the king's charger, he said, "Sir king, seest thou all yonder people?" "Yea, truly,"

CHAP.

XLIII.

1381.

CHAP. XLIII.
 1381.
 Altercation. replied the king. "Because," answered Tyler, "they be all at my commandment, and have sworn to me faith and truth, to do all that I will have them." Saying this, he observed a knight, whom the king had just before sent to him, and to whom he had expressed displeasure, on horseback, bearing a sword in state before the sovereign. "It had better become thee," said Tyler haughtily, "to be on foot in my presence." To this insolence the knight replied with spirit; and Tyler attempted to strike him with his dagger; but the king commanded the knight to dismount. Tyler then called for the knight's dagger, and by Richard's order it was delivered. He next required his sword. "The sword thou seest," answered the generous warrior, while he grasped it with a vigorous hand, "is not mine, but my king's; thou art not worthy to have it; nor wouldst thou dare to ask it, if there were here no more but thou and I." Tyler, exasperated at this contumacy, swore he would have the knight's head; and, regardless of his own situation, prepared to attack him in a desperate manner. Walworth,

Tyler slain.

mayor of London, who was at hand, ex-
 claimed it were great shame, if they should
 permit a noble knight to be murdered before
 their face; and immediately assaulted Tyler.
 The signal was sufficient, and the rebel
 speedily perished, covered with wounds.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

This was undoubtedly a most pregnant
 moment, and one false step would probably
 have caused the king and his party to be in-
 stantly massacred. The boy Richard, as if
 suddenly inspired with the genius of his
 father and grandfather, rode up to the rebels,
 who were by this time bending their bows,
 and exhorting each other to revenge the death
 of their chief. "What a work is this, my
 men?" said he. "What mean ye to do?
 Will you shoot at your king? Be not sorry
 for the death of a traitor and a ribald: I will
 be your captain and your leader: follow me
 into the fields, there to have whatsoever you
 will require." The multitude were struck
 with this extraordinary address: they com-
 plied with mute astonishment: time was
 gained: the mayor hastened to assemble a
 force for the deliverance of the king: the

Speech of
the king.

Incident
of the
rebel

He is re-
scued.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

gallant veteran, sir Robert Knolles, chanced to offer himself as the commander: the undisciplined rabble were taken by surprise, and filled with despair; and now quietly dispersed with such concessions as it was thought politic to grant them*.

Walworth, the mayor, who had so memorably distinguished himself on this occasion, with Philpot and two other citizens, received the honour of knighthood; and this seems to be the first instance in which the insignia of chivalry were thus diverted from their original appropriation. Walworth excused himself, that he was not worthy nor able to take such estate upon him, being but a merchant and accustomed to live by the fruits of his traffic: but his objection was overruled.

Punishment
of the
rebels.

The concessions made to the insurgents were afterward unconditionally revoked, as being granted under the influence of compulsion; and bloody execution was done upon

* Walsingham, Froissart, Knighton, Stow.

the guilty under the sanction of royal authority or of the law. Fifteen hundred persons are said to have perished in this manner, to expiate the crime of the insurrection^p.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

The proceedings of the insurgents under Wat Tyler were marked with the most flagitious enormities: their steps were to be traced by the wanton and brutal executions which they perpetrated; and, not content with signalling their vengeance upon such of their countrymen as with or without reason they judged to be their oppressors, they arbitrarily proscribed the natives of a separate region, the Flemings, numbers of whom were to be found in our metropolis, and insolently put them to the brief trial of their ability to pronounce certain English words, every one who failed being put to death. Nor ought we to wonder at this. The bulk of the nation were at this time predial slaves: and it is not so much climate, as the moral condition in which a people is placed,

Atrocities
of Tyler
and his
associ-
ates.

^p Froissart, Chap. lxxix,

CHAP. XLIII.
 1381. that regulates their demeanour. The English character such as in later periods it has been found; that character which seems to know no affinity to the atrocities of arbitrary bloodshed; which, in seasons of popular licence and frenzy, and amidst the vicissitudes of civil contention, has preserved a comparative decency and moderation that few other countries can boast; had not yet assumed its attributes and form: it was germinating, but not disincumbered from its parent clay. For that character we are indebted to the species of individual security which we have enjoyed, and to the spirit of independence and self-respect which the consciousness of individual security engenders: these circumstances, combining with the unusual share of intellectual power which we have derived from the bounty of nature, has made us what we are, that great and extraordinary people, to which future ages, when the annals of England shall have become ancient history, will be able to do unbiased and ample justice.

View
 which the
 state of
 society at
 This was the state of society which Chaucer saw, and which could not but occasion

to him many profound reflections. He was a poet; and no man can be worthy of that name, who has not attentively studied the sensations and modes of feeling which various external impressions are calculated to produce in the human mind. He was the poet of character and manners; such he eminently appears in his last and most considerable work, the Canterbury Tales. He was a statesman, closely connected with, and deeply interested in, the changing fortunes of the first prince of the blood. From all these reasons we may be convinced, that he was no careless and indifferent spectator of what was acting on the great theatre of public affairs. If John of Gaunt had not foreseen the tumults of this period, we may well believe that Chaucer foresaw them. Not exactly in time and place; for that is not the province of human sagacity. But he saw the posture of society; he saw what was passing in the minds of men; he heard the low, indistinct, murmuring, pent up sound, that preceded this memorable crash of the elements of the moral world. He perceived the op-

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.
this time
produced
in the
mind of
Chaucer.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

and with
his body
and in
to his
mouth

pressed and fettered multitude shaking their chains, and noted their quick, impatient pants after freedom and happiness. Like every good man, and every true lover of his species, it is reasonable to suppose that he sympathised in their cause, and wished success to their aims, till he saw them conducting themselves in such a manner, as was no less destructive to themselves than calamitous to their lords, and as led to the introduction of universal ignorance and barbarism. We shall presently see how strenuously he exerted himself two years after for the immunities of his fellow citizens of the metropolis.

Way in
which it
modified
his genius
and for-
tune.

The insurrection of this period is in another way connected with the life of Chaucer. The causes which produced the excesses of Wat Tyler and his associates were the causes to which Chaucer owed his being as a poet. At no earlier period was it possible that a layman, the son of a trader of the city of London, should have risen to the eminence of being the first literary character of his country. He is not a writer of extravagant romances, but, in a degree little inferior to

any man that ever lived, the poet of nature. CHAP.
XLIII.
1381.
He paints his fellow beings with a free and an intrepid hand. Even the descriptive parts of his works testify the freedom of his mind. He breathes the pure and soul-stirring element, he catches the glowing colours that variegate the great landscape of the universe, with senses such as never belonged to the man whose body was in chains, and who was bred a slave.

All nature must be set in motion to make a poet. Every thing within the circumference of political society must concur to ripen his talents and expand his powers, to feed his reflections with wholesome aliment, and to awaken in him the consciousness of what he is. Nothing can more strongly confirm this theory than the example of Chaucer. When did England first produce a man, since the revival of literature, worthy to be called a poet? When the enormous and cumbersome mass of the feudal system was more than half crumbled away, when the popular part of our constitution began to rear its head, and man in a collective sense learned to look

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1381.

inward upon himself. We should observe however that the state favourable to the creative and original powers of our species is a state of activity, not a state of turbulence and disorder. The reign of the Plantagenets was auspicious to the improvement of intellect; the period of the civil wars which succeeded, almost overthrew all that had previously been gained. The state of society required must be a state where all is cheerful, every thing is in a motion, and the humours of the body politic circulate freely; not a state of fever, wild and incoherent fancies, inflammation and death.

Antipathy
of the in-
surgents
to the
king of
Castille.

To the insurgents of this period the king of Castille appears to have been particularly obnoxious, and it is requisite that we should enquire into the causes of this protracted unpopularity. It was rather to be expected that he should at this time have been looked up to as the saviour of his country; and the mildness and generosity of his temper especially fitted him to appear in that character. Having withdrawn from all concern in the administration of public affairs, it was to be

expected that he should have escaped that odium which ordinarily attaches to the situation of a minister. More elevated in rank, more opulent in fortune, and perhaps we may add more distinguished in talents, than any other eminent political character in England, we might have imagined that the retired and disinterested station he had chosen for himself, would have fixed all eyes upon him as the arbiter of differences, the oracle to be consulted in matters of urgent and delicate solution, and the guardian genius of England. The contrary of this however was evidently the case. Those persons whose purpose it was to exclude him from the helm of affairs were deeply interested to divert from him the breath of popular applause, and they were but too successful in the malignant industry they were solicitous to employ.

They had begun, as we have seen, with representing him as secretly aspiring to the crown, and of consequence as a man whose measures relative to his nephew were all to be imputed to the worst and most treacherous motives. They had calumniated his temper,

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XLIII.

1381.

Causes of
his un-
popula-
rity.

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1381.

and had seized or invented occasions to persuade his countrymen that he was harsh, imperious, overbearing and revengeful. If he had had the reality of these qualities, his adversaries would have been less successful in misrepresenting him; the placability of his temper encouraged them to offend, and prevented him from employing those strong and peremptory measures which would best have vindicated him from their attacks. His declared principles on the subject of ecclesiastical establishments gave new energies to their animosity; they held it as the only means of their safety, to disarm the very impulse of reformation by doing injury to him. It must also be acknowledged that, whatever were the solid and essential merits of John of Gaunt, he was deficient in the arts of setting them off to advantage. He was not skilled to court the wayward suffrage of the public voice; he was ignorant of the thousand arts by which virtues are often made to appear of twofold value, and defects are metamorphosed into merits and graces. He had the elevated and free spirit of a son of chivalry, and could

not condescend to indirect and circuitous means. He disdained to imitate the men whom he often saw laying aside the dignity of their station to court and level themselves with the mean, personating a humility which they did not feel, and bringing into play every hypocritical and insinuating artifice to cajole the favour of the vulgar. He was the friend of the people, and expected to be recognised for what he was. His thoughts were honourable, and his heart was clear ; and he regarded this as the sufficient basis of a solid reputation. He was desirous to be the actual possessor of excellences, and did not dream of adopting a distinct series of actions that he might seem to be what he was.

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1381.

A misunderstanding particularly unfortunate in the present moment, had broken out in the year 1380 between John of Gaunt and his old and constant friend, the earl of Northumberland. The Scots had repeated their annual ravages in the summer of this year ; and Northumberland, as one of the lords of the marches, prepared to take venge-

Quarrel of
John of
Gaunt
and the
earl of
North-
umber-
land.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

ance upon them for their aggression^p. The king of Castille in the mean time received an ample commission to redress all wrongs, and adjust all differences with respect to the Scottish nation^q; and orders were issued to the earl of Northumberland to abstain from hostilities till the arrival of the new commander^p. It does not appear that John of Gaunt engaged in any military measures on this occasion: he obtained from the Scots a truce for a year^r, and afterward an enlargement of this truce till the spring of 1383^s. The orders which were sent to the earl of Northumberland might therefore have been intended either to prevent the unnecessary effusion of blood, or for the purpose of reserving the honour to be acquired on this occasion for the person to whom was assigned the principal command. If the former were the motive, it reflects the highest lustre upon the king of

^p Walsingham, ad ann.

^r Rymer, Nov. 1.

^q Rymer, 4 Ric. 2, Sep. 6.

^s ditto, Jun. 18.

Castille; and if the latter, it was probably considered as a proceeding of course, when a person of higher rank and possessing a more ample commission was about to arrive. The earl however was animated with that haughtiness of spirit and delicacy of honour, which we are accustomed to ascribe to the knights and warriors of old; and could not tamely brook this restraint put upon him on the part of a prince toward whom he had displayed the most zealous attachment on trying occasions.

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XLIII.

1381.

John of Gaunt had been induced, for the purpose of his conferences with the Scots, to advance to the northward; while he left his equipage, and the provisions that would be required in case hostilities should become necessary, sheltered by the walls and garrison of the fortress of Berwick¹. It was while he was thus advanced upon the Scottish border, that he received the afflicting intelligence of

News received of
Wat Tyler's insurrection.

¹ Froissart, Chap. lxxiii.

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XLIII.

1381.

the revolt and triumphant progress of the English populace. Tragical communications sound larger and more terrible, when the person to whom they are made is at a distance from the place of action. Had the king of Castille been cast in the scene of these commotions, his courage and manly spirit would have been awakened; he would have bid defiance to the assaults of fear; he would have seen from moment to moment what the emergency of affairs called for, and have busied himself with earnestness and a sanguine hope in providing the remedy. Now he could hear of no interesting transaction till some days after it was past; he was without power to stem the torrent of events; his nephew, his family and his friends might be destroyed, the most terrible disasters that human imagination can figure might be completed, even while he was reflecting upon the subject, and shaping the forms of the possible future.

Truce concluded with the Scots.

The king of Castille had already received intelligence of the anarchy which so extensively reigned in his native country, before

he signed the truce of the eighteenth of June in the present year^u. Duty and sentiment alike urged his speedy return to the relief of a kingdom, of which he was naturally the guardian, though he was not formally recognised as such. He eagerly hastened toward his native home. The first stage of his march was Berwick, where he had left his provisions and his military chest. Into this town he was refused admittance by the officer who held the command of it under the earl of Northumberland^x.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

John of
Gaunt re-
fused en-
trance
into Ber-
wick.

We must call to mind the particulars of the present situation, before we can fully apprehend the pang which the king of Castille felt at this moment. He was cut off from all his friends, from all whom duty and the ties of nature instructed him to love. He was cut off from them at a season of unspeakable peril, when the king, his youthful ward, was compelled day after day to expose himself

^u Rymer, ubi supra. Froissart, Chap. lxxviii.

^x Froissart, ubi supra.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.
Distress of
the Spa-
nish prin-
cess, his
consort.

Anxieties
suffered
by John
of Gaunt.

to the violence of a brutal populace, drunk with prosperity and with blood; when his consort, the Spanish princess, fled with the most terrible apprehensions from Leicester to Pomfret, and from Pomfret to Knaresborough^y.

Nor was the king of Castille only prevented from assisting, or understanding the condition of, his family and country; he was exposed to the most painful anxiety as to his own situation and the clearness of his fame. The insurgents pointed their greatest animosity against him; they are said to have engaged in an oath that they would recognise no king whose name was John, meaning by this declaration to express their abhorrence of him^z; they made it one of their insolent conditions to their sovereign that his evil counsellors, his eldest uncle in particular, should be delivered into their hands to be treated according to their demerits, and rumours were industriously propagated that

^y Knighton, ad ann.

^z Walsingham, ad ann.

Richard had assented to this requisition ^a. CHAP.
XLIII.
1381.
 The bulk of his countrymen had expressed themselves dissatisfied, that the king of Castille had restrained the hostilities of the earl of Northumberland, while he wasted his own time in negotiation, instead of employing it in ravages and war. A report was circulated that he was making a traiterous use of the powers confided to him, and selling himself to the Scots, to prevail upon them to lend him an army to place him upon the English throne ^a. Such were the rumours which appear to have been spread against him by the insurgents; and, animated by these sentiments, one of the first outrages they committed when they entered London, was the demolition of his magnificent palace of the Savoy with its wealth and precious furniture. Palace of
the Sa-
voy
burned.
 This furniture is said to have exceeded in splendour that of any monarch in Christendom; and the quantity of gold, silver, and silver-gilt plate was sufficient to load five

^a Walsingham, ad anr.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

waggon^b. It was enough that any man was reputed to be his friend to render him an object of their pursuit; they reversed his arms, obliterated his name, and proclaimed him a traitor to his country. When he arrived at Berwick, he found himself unexpectedly treated as an exile and an outlaw. The governor of Berwick showed him an order under the king's hand, by which he was directed to admit no person within the walls of the garrison^c; the king of Castille was at this time notoriously in the neighbourhood upon the king's business, yet the order contained no exception for him.

Retires to
Edinburgh.

It is related by the historians^d, that in this dilemma John of Gaunt accepted the invitation of the Scottish nobility, and took up his abode for some months in the palace of Holyrood House in Edinburgh. This cannot be true to the extent here stated. Wat Tyler entered London on the twelfth of

^b Knighton, ad ann.

^c Froissart, Chap. lxxviii.

^d Walsingham, Knighton, Fordun, Buchanan, Collire,

June, and was killed on the fifteenth. On the eighteenth the king of Castille signed the Scottish truce. It was not till after the signature of this instrument, that he came to Berwick, and was there stopped in his journey to London. The letter of Richard, consoling his uncle under the losses he had sustained and the calumnies which had been propagated against him, and earnestly pressing his advance southward, is dated on the fifth of July^f. With this invitation John of Gaunt made haste to comply; and in the middle of August we find his name in a commission for tranquillising his country after the recent disorders^g. So that there does not appear to remain more than an interval of two or three weeks for his alleged residence at Holyrood House.

The incident itself supplies us with a pleasing picture of the manners at this time subsisting in certain ranks of life. The wars

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XLIII.

1381.

^f Rymer, ad annum et diem. ^g Ditto, 5 Ric. 2, Aug. 8.

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XLIII.

1381.

between the English and Scots were continual; the injuries and animosity from the time of Edward I. bitter and deep. John of Gaunt was the principal military commander on the part of England, and he had now marched north to repress the hostilities of the Scots by force, if he could not by negotiation bring them to the terms he desired. But all this was forgotten by the Caledonian leaders the instant they saw this illustrious personage overwhelmed with unmerited misfortunes; they opened to him the palace of their kings; they eagerly supplied to him every species of hospitality and consolation; and they proffered him an escort of troops for his safety, when he should be disposed to return to his own country.—This was under the reign of Robert, the first prince of the house of Stuart, who had succeeded to the Scottish throne in 1370.

Returns to
London.

Richard, to do greater honour to his uncle, sent letters to the nobility and sheriffs of the different northern counties, and among these to the earl of Northumberland, directing

them to escort him in his return^b; so that he came to the king at Reading with a company of one thousand men at arms beside archers, the persons who composed his escort being successively relieved as he passed from county to county^h. The attendance however of the earl of Northumberland, who repaired to him in obedience to the king's orders for that purpose, he refused, full of resentment for the ill treatment he had received from the earl's officer at Berwick^h. In November the parliament met, and these potent chieftains each repaired at the royal summons to that assembly. They came with an immense band of followers, and resorted each day to the parliament-house with such attendance of armed men, that it was not thought expedient to enter upon the public business, till their difference had been adjustedⁱ. At length, the king taking upon himself the oversight which had been committed, and acknow-

CHAP.
XLIII.

1384.

A parliament.

^a Rymer, 5 Ric. 2, Jul. 5.^h Knighton, ad ann.ⁱ Cotton and Walsingham, ad ann.

CHAP.
XLIII.

1381.

ledging that the governor of Berwick had only obeyed the letter of the royal mandate^k, the angry lords were prevailed upon to dismiss their quarrel, and assume a show of cordiality and good humour.

Expedition
of the earl
of Cam-
bridge into
Spain.

The tumults of this period were in a variety of ways injurious to the king of Castille. In the preceding year, Ferdinand king of Portugal, having conceived an animosity against John, son of Henry of Transtamare, the actual possessor of the Castillian throne, sent an invitation to John of Gaunt and his brother the earl of Cambridge, to come over with their Spanish brides and a select body of auxiliaries; in which case he promised to marry his daughter and the heiress of his crown, to the son of the earl of Cambridge, and to make every exertion to place John of Gaunt upon the throne to which he had so long pretended^l. The invitation was accepted with eagerness; there was nothing which John of Gaunt more earnestly desired than

^k Froissart, Chap. lxxx.

^l Rymer, 4 Ric. 2, Jul. 5.

to convert his empty title into a substantial dignity ; and the earl of Cambridge, with an aid of four thousand men immediately prepared to sail for Lisbon, John of Gaunt purposing to follow as soon as he should have settled the affairs of the Scottish border. The insurrections however which took place in the summer totally overturned this plan ; and the king of Portugal, whose temper was in the highest degree restless and capricious, irritated at finding that John of Gaunt did not follow his brother as he had engaged to do, suddenly concluded a peace with his enemy, one condition of which was that the English auxiliaries should be sent back to their own country in Castillian vessels, a disgrace to which the earl of Cambridge was obliged to submit^m.

The campaign of Edmund of Langley has been singularly misrepresented by certain historians and antiquaries. Walsingham says

^m Mariana, De Rebus Hispaniæ, Lib. XVIII, Cap. v.
Modern Universal History, Book XIX, Chap. i, Sect. 7.

CHAP. XLIII. that the English auxiliaries continued two
 1381. years in Spain. Sandford, no very accurate collector, represents John of Gaunt, as well as his brother, as engaged in this expedition, and applies to it the following verses of the old rhyming chronicler, Hardyngⁿ.

At whiche battaill duke John of Gaunt indede,
 And his brother Edmond then faught full
 sore ;

Were ner twoo better knightes then thei in-
 dede,

That better faught upon a feld afore,

It was but grace that thei escaped thore :

Thei putte theimselfes so far furth ay in prees,

That wounded wer thei bothe full sore, no lees.

Collins, in his Life of John of Gaunt, implicitly adopts this error ; but, being unable to conceive how John of Gaunt should be in Scotland and Spain at the same time, has thought proper of his own mere authority to transfer the Spanish expedition to the year

1382. Meanwhile Hardyng expressly fixes the application of his stanza to the battle of Auray, and the year 1364. The antiquaries however did no great injustice to the chronicler; since, though, as we have seen, the elder of the two royal brothers had no share in the Spanish campaign, yet in the battle of Auray, where, in the sublime representation of the poet, they were both sorely wounded, and hardly escaped with their lives, the fact is that they were neither of them present. The statement in the text is given partly on the authority of Rymer, and partly on that of the Spanish historians.

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XLIV.

1382.

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MARRIAGE OF RICHARD II.—LEGENDE OF GODE
WOMEN.—THE FLOURE AND THE LEFE.—POETS
OF THE DAISY.—FROISSART.—WILLIAM DE MA-
CHAUT.—SMALLER CLASSES OF POETICAL COM-
POSITION.

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XLIV.

1382.

IN the beginning of the following year, Richard II, being now fifteen years of age, engaged in marriage with Anne of Bohemia, sister to Wenceslaus emperor of Germany^a. This princess appears to have been about his own age; and the king, whose susceptible temper led him to conceive the most violent attachments, appears to have loved her, during the whole period in which she was his consort, with a fervour and passion that has sel-

^a Rymer, 5 Ric. 2, Dec. 13. Walsingham, ad ann.

dom been equalled. Her temper was cheerful; her manners were prepossessing; and the whole of her conduct was so blameless and humane, as to have gained her from contemporaries and posterity the appellation of the Good Queen Anne.

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XLIV.

1382.
Character
of Anne
of Bo-
hemia,
the queen.

This is the most auspicious and prosperous period of the reign of Richard. He had just conducted himself, in the scene of the rebels at Smithfield, with a propriety, a firmness and presence of mind, from which a man who was neither a courtier nor an enthusiast might reasonably have drawn a happy omen of the qualities of his riper years. Men saw in him every day more of the features of his illustrious father, who, from having perished immaturely, was the more a darling of the English nation. Now when he presented to them a young and amiable princess, whom they fondly regarded as the future mother to a race of kings, they viewed Richard himself with a more lively interest. The partiality entertained by a loyal nation to a youth of ten or twelve years, their sovereign, partakes rather of a wish to love, than of love itself.

Prosperous
situation
of the
young
king.

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1382.

Richard at this time, though young in age, became a husband; and his subjects viewed him clad in the substantial and respectable attributes of the domestic character. From this day he in some manner ceased to be a minor; he who is a husband and the master of a family, must be admitted to have entered into the obligation of the moral duties, and to have claimed the rights of a man. Hitherto the English had loved their king as the object of their expectations and their hopes; they now began to love him with that species of attachment which anxiously watches the proceedings of its favourite, eager to see its wishes realised in his conduct.

Chaucer
patronised
by the
queen.

Chaucer was one of the courtiers who came to pay their duty to their new sovereign. Anne of Bohemia, prompted, as we may suppose, as to his merits and character, complimented his talents, but condescendingly censured the topics upon which he had sometimes exercised them. The Romaunt of the Rose was evidently a satire upon the softer sex; Troilus and Creseide was the tale of a loyal lover and an inconstant mistress; both

severe against the ladies^b. These were the most voluminous of his works. Was it his real opinion that the whole sex deserved no better treatment? If so, however wonderful were his genius, he should never be her poet. If on the other hand he entertained sentiments of honourable gallantry, and was a genuine admirer of the sex, she advised him to make atonement for his fault by writing in praise of its worthier members.—It appears to have been at the queen's suggestion, that Chaucer produced his *Legende of Gode Women*.

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1382.

Legende
of Gode
Women.

This may be inferred from a couplet in the introductory part of the poem, in which the author says,

And when this boke is made, yeve it the
quene

On my behalf, at Eltham or at Shene.

ver. 496.

Elsewhere in the introduction he takes oc-

^b *Legende of Gode Women*, ver. 320—334.

CHAP. XLIV. casion to enumerate his principal works, and

among them the House of Fame, and the

1382. "deit of Blaunché the Duchesse^c," both

written after the death of queen Philippa.

The mention of the palace of Shene, which

Richard demolished for grief for queen Anne

who died there, proves, if the chronology of

Chaucer's life did not sufficiently prove it,

that the Legende of Gode Women could not

be written for any queen of a later date than

Anne of Bohemia.

a translation,

The Legende of Gode Women is, in part

at least, a translation. This may be con-

cluded from Chaucer's poem of the Court of

Love, written in 1346, in which he has in-

troduced an explicit mention of the topics of

this poem, proving that it was already in

existence, before Chaucer treated its subjects

in English. There, as here, Alcestis, the wife

of Admetus king of Thessaly, who laid down

her life to save that of her husband, is men-

tioned as the queen of Good Women^d; and

^c ver. 417, 418. ^d ver. 108.

from the same passage it appears that the true number of the "ladies gode" who followed the standard of Alcestis, was nineteen*, though the memory of only ten of them is celebrated in Chaucer's poem.

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The plan of the poem is as follows. Chaucer in a dream sees the God of Love, splendidly attired, and leading by the hand Alcestis as his queen. They are followed by nineteen ladies of eminent worth and constancy in love; and after them follows a multitude of women who, though less distinguished, each laid claim to a similar praise. Their number is at first stated (the verses are somewhat corrupted, but this appears to be the sense) as greater than Chaucer imagines the number of persons would be, if the third or fourth part of the whole human race from the creation of Adam had been assembled in one plain. Afterward he describes them as twenty thousand; but this is probably put indefinitely for a large number, and by no

Plan of the
poem.

* See also Legende, ver. 383.

CHAP. means intended to circumscribe the statement
XLIV.

already made.

1382.

Cupid's
displea-
sure
against
Chaucer.

Alcestis be-
comes his
advocate.

The God of Love, discovering Chaucer, addresses him with much sternness, and asks him how he presumes to appear in a spot devoted to the honour of the fair, he who had been so atrociously their calumniator in the two poems already named, of Troilus, and the Romaunt of the Rose? Alcestis in reply undertakes to plead in mitigation of the poet's offence. She alleges that perhaps what he did was done inadvertently and with no evil intention, and perhaps the subjects were prescribed to him by some person whose commands he could not with propriety resist. She observes that the works in which he had done amiss were translations, and that his fault therefore ought not to be reckoned so grievous as if he had been himself the inventor of the libels; beside which, he has perhaps deeply repented of the error into which he had fallen. She adds that he had written many other things, wholly unexceptionable in their nature; such as

Many an hymné for your holy daies,
That highten balades, rondels, virelaies,

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ver. 422.

1382.

the translations of Boethius *de Consolatione*, of Origen on the Madelaine, and the Life of St. Cecilia : and many things expressly in honour of love and of the sex ; the House of Fame, the Death of the Duchess Blanche, the Parliament of Birds, and the story of Palamon and Arcite. The whole of her argument is interspersed with excellent lessons of government ; such as, that it is unworthy of a king to listen to every light accusation, that envy, the mother of calumnies is the constant attendant upon courts, that a monarch should not conduct himself as if he were the mere farmer of the revenues of a state, but should think of his liege-man “ as of his tresour, and his golde in cofer,” that he should do right alike to rich and poor, and that he should compassionate the weak, as a lion,

Whan a flie offendeth him or biteth,
He with his taile awaie the flie ysmitheth

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XLIV.

1382.

Al esily, for of his genterie
Him deineth nat to wreke him on a flie.

ver. 392.

Praise of
nineteen
ladies.

The mediation of Alcestis is successful.
The God courteously surrenders into her
hands the whole question of the poet's of-
fence; and she prescribes that, by way of
expiating his offence, he shall write a Legende

Of Gode Women, both maidens and eke
wives,

That weren trewe in loving all 'her lives;
And tel of falsé men that hem betraien,
That al 'her life ne do nat but assaien
How many women they may done a shame;
For in your world that is now holde a game.

ver. 484.

The God confirms the award of Alcestis,
with this addition, that, when he has com-
pleted the praise of the other females most
entitled to his eulogium, he shall crown the
whole with the story and praise of Alcestis.

their.

herself, who by her conduct on earth had gained the distinction of being made the selected companion and partner of the God of Love.

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1382.

The ladies celebrated in so much as was written by Chaucer, or so much as remains to us, of his *Legende*, are Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle, Medea, Lucretia, Ariadne, Philomela, Phyllis and Hypermnestra. The names of seven others in the illustrious catalogue are incidentally preserved in the *Canterbury Tales*^s; Dejanira, Hermione, Hero, Helen, Briseis, Laodamia and Penelope; and from the way in which they are mentioned it seems to follow that the stories of these last, as well as of the former, had been written by Chaucer. Taken together they amount to seventeen, and, with the addition of Alcestis herself, to eighteen. The two other names, for there were nineteen ladies independently of Alcestis, are by some accident omitted in the enumeration in the *Canterbury Tales*, at least in the manuscripts hitherto consulted by the editors.

^s ver. 4486—4495.

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XLIV.

1382.
Their ge-
neral cha-
racter-
istics.

The sub-
jects taken
from Ovid
and other
classic
writers.

Varied in
certain
particu-
lars.

It is obvious on the face of this catalogue, that the ladies who are celebrated are not all of them irreproachable on the score of chastity, or of certain other attributes usually admitted into the list of moral virtues. It seems to have been regarded by the author as sufficient if they were true in love, or if they were chargeable with no infidelity in that article; and, even with that deduction, some of the Ladies Gode could perhaps with difficulty be vindicated. All the stories are classical, and a very great majority of them extracted from Ovid's Heroical Epistles.

It may further be observed that Chaucer has taken the liberty of softening some of his narrations, when they contained circumstances too horrible to have place in a work designed for the perusal of a queen. The rape of Lucretia is perpetrated, while she had

lost at ones both her wit and breth,
And in a ^h swough she lay, and woxe so ded,
Men mighten smiten of her arme or hed,
She feleth nothing.

ver. 136.

Medea's murder of her children is also suppressed ; as well as every allusion to the other forty-nine daughters of Danaus, married on the same day as Hypermnestra, each of whom killed her husband in obedience to her father's command. On the other hand, Chaucer has made Dido with child at the period of her catastrophe, a circumstance not to be found in the ancients ; and has deviated from the historical account of the death of Cleopatra, by making her leap into a pit full of adders and other venomous serpents, in despair for the loss of Antonius.

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1382.

The Legende of Gode Women is written in a somewhat humorous spirit of exaggeration, as to the infidelity and treacherous practices of the male sex. The task of writing was, as we have seen, in some degree imposed upon Chaucer ; and he politely and gracefully plays with his subject. He felt that it was not a time to hold the strict balance of justice, when a queen demanded of him a panegyric upon her sex ; at the same time that he has treated certain points of his subject in so easy and sportive a style,

Vices of
the male
sex hu-
morously
exagger-
ated.

CHAP. as not to compromise his character for vera-
 XLIV. city. Thus, in closing the story of Philomela,
 1382. he addresses the sex,

Ye maie beware of men, if that you liste :
 For, ⁱ all be that he woll not for his shame
 Doén as Tereus, to ^k lese his name,
 Ne serve you as a murtherer or a knave,
 Ful little whilé shul ye trewe him have
 (That wol I sain, al wer he now my brother),
¹ But if so be that he maie have none other.

And again, in winding up the tale of Phyllis,

Beware, ye women, of your subtill fo
 (Sens yet this daie men maie ensample se),
 And ^m trusteth now in love no man but me.

Legende of
 Hypsi-
 pyle.

The story of Hypsipyle is told with re-
 markable spirit. The author begins thus.

Thou ⁿ rote of falsé lovers, duke Jason,
 Thou ^o sleer, devourer and confusion

ⁱ albeit. ^k lose. ¹ But if so be, Unless.
^m trust, imperative. ⁿ root. ^o slayer.

Of gentill women, gentill créatures,
 Thou madest thy ^preclaiming and thy lures
 To ladies, of thy ^ascathliche aparaunce,
 And of thy wordés ^rfarsed with plesaunce,
 And of thy fained trouth, and thy manere,
 With thine obéisaunce and humble chere,
 And with thine counterfeited pain and wo;
^sThere other ^tfalsen one thou falsed two.
 O often swore thou, that thou wouldest die
 For love, whan thou ne feltest maladie,
 Save foule delite, whiche that thou callest
 love!

If that I ^ulive, thy name shall be ^wyshove
 In Englishe, that thy deceit shall be knowe:
 Have at the, Jason; now thin horn is blow.

The project of Jason is then related for the acquisition of the golden fleece. He touches at the island of Lemnos, where he and Hercules, the most illustrious of his as-

Hypocri-
tical be-
haviour of
Hercules.

^p A term in falconry, for bringing the hawk to the fist, by a certain call. *Tyrwhit.*

^a hurtful, causing mischief; in this case, by too much beauty.

^r stuffed. ^s Where. ^t deceive. ^u am now alive.

^w shoved, pushed into notice.

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sociates, are received with great hospitality by Hypsipyle, daughter of the king of the island. Hercules in particular wins her confidence, though without mixture “ of love, or soche imagination.” This confidence he abuses to the basest purposes.

This Hercules hath this Jason so preised,
That to the sunne he hath him up yreised,
That halfe so true a man there ^x nas of love
Under the cope of heven that is above;
And he was wise, hardie, secrete and riche,
Of these ^y iii pointés there ^z nas none him
^a liche;

Of fredome passed he, and ^b lustie hedde
All ^c tho that liven, and all ^c tho ben dedde;
Thereto so grete a gentillman was he,
And of Thessalie likely king to be:
There ^z nas no lacke, but that he was ^d agast
To love, and for to speken ^e shaméfast;

^x ne was, was not.

^z double negative: a Gallicism.

^b lustihed, manly vigour.

^d fearful, reluctant.

^y read iiiii.

^a like.

^c those.

^e shamefaced, irresolute.

^f Him had lever himself murder and die,
Than that men should a lover him espie :

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^g As woldé God above that I had give
My blode and fleshe, so that I mighten live
With the bones, that he had ^h aught where a
wife

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For his estate ; for soche a lustie life
She shulden leden with this lustie knight.

And all this was compassed on the night
Betwixen Jason and this Hercules.

And Jason is as coie as is a maide ;
He loketh pitously, but naught he saied ;
But frely yave he to her counsailers
Yeftés full grete.

ver. 157.

One topic, suggested by the *Legende of Gode Women*, remains to be treated, which is of no small importance in the history of the poetry of the fourteenth century. I mean, the homage paid by Chaucer and others to the daisy. This, like most of the improvements and inventions in the poetry of these early ages, we unquestionably received from the French. What other my-

Poetry of
the daisy.

^f He had rather.

^g God willing, I would give.

^h any where.

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steries were hid under this symbol we are unable to trace : it came recommended to the ingenious and subtle wits of that period by the threefold sense of the French term [*Marguerite*], which is either a daisy, a pearl, or the name of a woman. It has been conjectured that Chaucer had a mistress named Margaretⁱ; similar conjectures have been made respecting the other poets who have adopted this mythology^j: it is not likely to be true of all; perhaps it was true only of the inventor.

Froissart.

Froissart, so well known and so celebrated for his historical collections, and a contemporary of Chaucer, has been held by some antiquarians to be the author of the worship of the daisy^k. His poems, which are numerous, have never been printed; but they appear to have obtained a considerable degree of popularity in the life-time of their author.

ⁱ Speght, Life of Chaucer; his friends. Life of Chaucer, apud Urry. Warton. Vol. I, Sect. xviii. Refuted by Tyrwhit, Preface, Appendix C, note n.

^j St. Palaye, apud Memoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions, Tom. XIV.

^k Warton, Vol. I, Sect. xviii.

They are not rich in fancy, nor often happy in invention; but there is a truth and simplicity in the style in which they are written¹, well calculated, while they possessed the advantage of novelty, to recommend them to general favour.

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In one of them, entitled *Le Dit de la Fleur de Marguerite*, the production of the daisy is thus fabulously related. Heres, a faithful votary of love, has the misfortune to lose her admirer Cepheus in the bloom of youth. She is inconsolable; she frequently visits his grave; and, from the tears she sheds there, springs up the daisy. Mercury was another lover of Heres, but she is constant in the rejection of his suit. By accident he discovers this extraordinary flower in January on the grave of Cepheus, gathers it, and presents it to the damsel. This singular gift renders her propitious to his addresses; and Mercury in gratitude determines to wear a chaplet of daisies round his bonnet for ever after¹.

His fable of
the daisy.

¹ St. Palaye, ubi supra.

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Not the
founder of
the school.

Mythology
of Chau-
cer.

Froissart however is not the inventor of the panegyric of the daisy. The manuscript volume of his poems in the library of the king of France, is expressed in the title to consist of poems written between the years 1362 and 1394^m. But Chaucer, in his poem of the Court of Loveⁿ, written in 1346, has introduced the homage of the daisy; and that with the same idea as is annexed to it in the Legende of Gode Women^o, that Alcestis, the exemplary wife of Admetus, was after her death metamorphosed into a daisy.

But, though Chaucer has cursorily touched upon this fiction in his Court of Love, he did not regularly enlist himself among the worshippers of the daisy till toward the close of his life. In the Romaunt of the Rose his homage is paid to a more splendid and sumptuous flower. In his poem of the Floure and the Lefe, which of course was written previously to the Legende of Gode Women, being twice referred to in the course of that

^m Pasquier, Recherches de la France, Liv. VII, Chap. v.

ⁿ ver. 104.

^o ver. 512.

poem^p, he has adopted an allegory inconsistent with the mythology of the performance last named, an inconsistency which he there endeavours to reconcile^q.

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A brief account of the poem of the Floure and the Lefe cannot be more properly introduced than here; interrupting the narrative of the worship of the daisy, as Chaucer himself interrupted his poetical devotion to this favoured flower in the course of his literary life.

The Floure
and the
Lefe.

This performance is in a very striking style of imagery, gay, variegated and diffuse. The author goes forth, early in the morning in the month of May, to hear the nightingale. He enters into a pleasant grove, and, by a path in which the tread of feet is scarcely perceptible, arrives at an arbour of sycamore and eglantine. While he reposes in this retreat, he is first saluted with the song of the goldfinch perched upon a medlar-tree, and then by that of the nightingale from a

Goldfinch.

Nightingale.

^p ver. 72, and 189.

^q ver. 189.

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Ladies of
the Leaf.

Their
knights.

Worship of
the laurel.

Knights
and ladies
of the
Flower.

laurel. Soon after, he is surprised with the sound of female voices ; and sees issuing from a neighbouring grove a troop of ladies, clad in white velvet, the seams laced with emeralds and other precious stones, and on their heads green chaplets of laurel, woodbine, or *agnus castus*. The ladies engage variously in songs and dancing. Meanwhile advances, on the same side from which they had issued, a multitude of men at arms, clad, like the ladies, in white velvet, the most distinguished with crowns of laurel, and the rest with chaplets of oak, woodbine and hawthorn. These engage in justs ; and, their games being finished, they join the ladies, and advance together, to do honour, with song and dance, to the fairest and largest laurel-tree that was ever beheld. Among the men at arms, are distinguished the Nine Worthies, the Knights of Arthur's Round Table, Charlemagne's Twelve Peers of France, and the Knights of the order of the Garter, recently instituted by Edward III.

This ceremony being complete, the poet next sees in an opposite direction, advancing

from the open field, a multitude of knights and ladies, clad in green, adorned with chaplets of flowers, and preceded by minstrelsy, the harp, the pipe, the lute and the psaltery. These proceed toward a plot of flowers, to which they do reverence, singing an ode, the burthen of which is *Si douce est la Marguerite*, at the same time joining in a variety of dances.

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Worship of
the daisy.

While they are thus occupied they are burned with the scorching sun, and afterward overtaken with a storm of wind, rain and hail, without means of shelter such as the former company enjoyed from the spreading shade of the laurel. The storm has also the effect of entirely dispersing and destroying the flowers with which their persons had been adorned, as well as those to which they had paid their adoration.

Sun and
rain.

The tempest being dispersed, the party of the Leaf come forward, and offer hospitality to the unfortunate party of the Flower; applying herbs and ointments to their burns, and lighting stately fires to dry their clothes. Horses are then prepared, and they depart

Hospitality
of the
party of
the Leaf.

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together to the refreshments prepared by the lady of the Leaf, the nightingale having first perched upon her hand ; and the goldfinch,

that fro the medlar-tre
Was fled for hete unto the bushes cold,
ver. 442.

presenting his homage to the lady of the Flower.

Explanation.

The lady of the Leaf is afterward explained to be Diana ; and the lady of the Flower, Flora. The ladies in the train of Diana who have chaplets of *agnus castus* are virgins ; those crowned with woodbine, such as have been true in love ; and such as are crowned with laurel, women distinguished by heroical exploits. The Flower is the symbol of idleness, which,

within a litel space,
Wollen be lost ; so simple of nature
It be, that it no grevance may endure,
And every storne wol blow it sone away.
ver. 558.

The Leaf on the contrary is the symbol of perseverance,

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Whose lusty grene may not ^r appaired be,
But kepeth her beauty.

ver. 553.

The poem of the Floure and the Lefe is a production of Chaucer, with which Dryden was “so particularly pleased, both for the invention and the moral^s,” as to induce him to transfuse it into modern English. He has somewhat obscured the purpose of the tale, which in the original is defective in perspicuity; but he has greatly heightened the enchantment of its character. He has made its personages fairies who annually hold a jubilee, such as is here described, on the first of May; Chaucer had left the species of the beings he employs vague and unexplained. In a word, the poem of Dryden, regarded merely as the exhibition of a soothing and delicious luxuriance of fancy, may be classed

Dryden's
version of
the Flow-
er and
the Leaf.

^r impaired.

^s Preface to Fables.

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with the most successful productions of human genius. No man can read it without astonishment, perhaps not without envy, at the cheerful, well-harmonised and vigorous state of mind in which its author must have been at the time when he wrote it.

We see in the poem of the Floure and the Lefe, as well as in that of the Court of Love, an allusion to the mythology of the daisy ; but it is not set out with all its circumstances except in the Prologue to the Legende of Gode Women. This mythology, as has already been observed, must have been older than the fiction of Froissart, since it is mentioned by Chaucer in the earliest of his works. Who was its inventor is uncertain : perhaps William de Machaut, a French versifier, who wrote a poem of the Lily and the Daisy¹, and whom we shall presently have occasion to mention. It is at least reasonable to believe, that it was the same person who wrote the

¹ Le Beuf, Notice Sommaire de Deux Volumes de Poesies, apud Académie des Inscriptions, Tom. XX.

tales of the "ladies gode xix," mentioned in the Court of Love, and translated or imitated in the poem which forms the principal subject of this chapter.

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The mythology of the daisy is necessarily introduced by Chaucer, in a work, of which Alcectis, once a woman, but now changed into this flower, is the principal personage. The invention of this metamorphosis, and the elevation of the Grecian dame to the exalted place in which we see her in the writings of Chaucer, are of the same date. Nothing can more happily elucidate the temper of the fictions of chivalry, and the contrast which they afford to those of classical mythology, than this revolution in the conclave of heaven. The mythology of the ancient Greek and Roman poets is little favourable to chastity, and less so to that generous deference which modern manners are accustomed to render to the female character. Their Gods are almost universally libertines and ravishers; and the Goddess to whom the poets of the softer passions paid their especial devotion, is a shameless adul-

Alcectis
queen of
love.

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tress. The more reserved and decorous poets of chivalry were embarrassed with this mythology. They could not entirely depose Venus from the rank which she had so long occupied; but they resorted to a sort of conciliatory expedient. They superannuated her, and substituted another, as the active and administering divinity, in her room. The personage thus chosen was the most exemplary wife of antiquity; a lady who, according to the venerable tradition which they took for their guide, being informed by an oracle that the only condition on which fate would release her husband from the mortal disease under which he laboured, was that one of his friends should consent to die in his stead, offered to become, and was accepted by heaven as, that friend^u. This lady is introduced in Chaucer's earliest work, and in the *Legende of Gode Women*, as the Queen of Love; and, as she is spoken of in the early work as the person "to whom obeied the

^u Euripides, *Tragediæ*: *Alcestis*.

ladies gode xix^x," it follows that it was not CHAP.
Chaucer, but rather the original contriver of XLIV.
the Legende, to whom she was indebted for 1382.
her elevation.

In Chaucer's version of the Legende, the Her flower
adoration of the daisy is introduced with extolled.
much solemnity. The poet, having occasion
to mention his attachment to study, proceeds,

There is gamé none,
That fro my bokés maketh me to gone,
But it be seldome, on the holie day :
Save certainly whan that the month of Maie
Is comen.

ver. 33.

In May, no morning occurs in which he does
not go forth before the dawn, "to sene this
floure ayenst the sunne ysprede," and there
"to do it reverence."

And, whan that it is eve, I renné blithe,
As sone as ever the sunne ginneth west,
To sene this floure how it woll go to rest.

ver. 60.

* ver. 108.

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The season of the poem is the first of May. The author has been through the whole day employed in watching this favoured production of nature, and at night falls asleep in an arbour where he dreams that he is similarly engaged. In this situation, kneeling upon the ground, supported by his elbow, and gazing with never-wearied attention upon "this floure white and rede," he is surprised by Cupid and Alcestis, and the scene follows which has already been mentioned. It is in this poem that Chaucer supplies us with his etymology of daisy, which he explains to mean the *eye of day*.

Botany of
the daisy.

It is somewhat singular, that the flower selected by the poets of the fourteenth century as the object of their amorous worship, should be that which modern botanists have fixed upon as the most consummate and superb of the various classes of these beautiful ornaments of nature. While the lily, the tulip, the rose, and others more calculated to fix the attention of an indolent spectator, are comparatively simple, the daisy, as they

remark^y, modest and unpretending in its appearance, seems to be one, but in reality contains in a single calix two or three hundred flowers, each having separately its corolla, its germ, its pistil, its stamina and its seed. Such is the true description of the various members of the circle of white foliage which forms as it were its exterior garland, and of the orange-coloured cylindrical shoots which compose the body or centre of the flower. Both the one and the other, though seemingly single, are actually hollow, and contain in their cavity every essential provision for multiplying their kind. It is remarkable that Chaucer, in amplifying the praises of the object of his panegyric, falls almost into the terms of botanical science. Speaking of Alcestis, who was "clad in roiall habite grene," with a garland of fine oriental pearls, and, above that, a fret of gold, upon her head^z, he says

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^y Rousseau, Lettres Élémentaires sur la Botanique: Lettre VI.

^z This dress is fancied, to give Alcestis an appearance somewhat resembling that of the daisy.

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For all so many virtues haddé she
 As smal florounés in her chaplet be :
 In remembraunce of her,—
 Cybilla made the daiesie and the flour,
 Icrowned al with white,—
 And Mars yave her a corowne red, * pardé,
 In stede of rubies set among the white.

ver. 528.

Poetical ex-
aggeration.

After all, the daisy must be confessed to be an inadequate emblem of that object which is to excite the transports and enthusiasm of a poet's mind. It has in the first place the disadvantage of being the most common and trivial of flowers : and such is the structure of the human mind, that the thing which is not somewhat rare cannot much be admired. If every man we met were a man of original powers of mind, genius would cease to call forth our wonder. If the whole female sex were illustriously fair and beautiful, beauty itself would come to be regarded with in-

* by God, by heavens. This expression in Chaucer is merely expletive.

difference. The daisy is besides a humble plant ; it assumes no state, and inspires no awe. It cannot boast any particular freshness of hue, or glow of tint. It has no odour ; or, if it has odour, certainly no perfume.

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All these defects however are supplied by the wantonness of the poet's fancy. If Chaucer's panegyric of the daisy were read in some distant climate, where the species itself was unknown, the reader would form to himself the most exalted and luxurious ideas of its excellence :

As she that is of all floures the floure,
Fulfilled of all vertue and honoure ;
And ever ylike faire and fresh of hewe,
As wel in winter, as in summer, newe.

ver. 53.

And again,

Of soche swetnesse and soche odour oer all,
That, for to speke of gomme or herbe or tre,
Comparison may none ymaked be ;
For it surmounteth plainly all odoures,
And of riche beauté the most gaye of floures.

ver. 120.

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The original
of the
Floure and
the Lefe
written by
a lady.

One circumstance worthy to be noticed occurs in the poem of the Floure and the Lefe. In the rubric of the work in the old copies, the subject is stated thus: "A gentlewoman, out of an arbour in a groue, seeth a great company of knights and ladies, &c." In like manner Dryden has entitled his version of this poem, "The Flower and the Leaf: or, The Lady in the Arbour." This is sufficiently authorised in the body of the performance; since the lady who explains to the author the meaning of the various objects which present themselves, three times in Chaucer employs the vocative address, "my doughter^b." There is nothing in the nature of the objects seen that should make it less proper for the beholder to be a man than a woman; and the early walk with which the poem commences, the author setting out upon a solitary ramble at three hours after midnight^c, seems best to suit the hardier and more adventurous sex. The most natural

^b ver. 462, 500, 547.

^c ver. 24.

solution of the difficulty is, that the author of the original poem, for the work in Chaucer has the air of a translation, was a woman.

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And in that case we are here presented with perhaps the first example which occurs in the history of modern literature, of a lady having been the writer of a work of invention of so considerable extent.

In Pasquier^d and Fauchet^e we meet indeed with a poetess of the thirteenth century, called Marie de France, who translated into French verse the Fables of Esop, and certain Lays, or polite tales, which appear to have been the growth of the province of Brittany, and to have been originally written in the Armorican language^f. Both these productions are to be found in the same volume in the British Museum^g.

Having had occasion in this chapter to mention Froissart as a poet, it may not be improper, before we pass to another subject,

Poetry of
the reign
of Charles
V. of
France.

^d Liv. VIII, Chap. i.

^e Liv. II, Chap. lxxxiv.

^f Tyrwhit, Discourse, note 24.

^g Ms. Harleian. No. 978.

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to advert to a further particular of his fame. He is treated by Pasquier, in his *Recherches de la France*^h, as the founder of a new species of poetry ; such as the chant-royal, the ballad, the pastoral and the rondeau : or at least this class of poetical compositions is represented by that writer as contemporary with Froissart, and the growth of the reign of Charles V. Pasquier describes the French poetry as having declined for some time previously to that era ; the writers in the vulgar tongue having ceased to produce new romances, or heroic tales in verse, and amusing themselves with clothing such as they already possessed, in the garb of prose. After some interval however, the spirit of verse again descended upon the nation ; and this revival of poetry was distinguished by the introduction of these lighter and shorter forms of composition, which the writer whom we are quoting distinguishes by the appellation of *mignardises*, pretty, delicate or quaint schemes of versification.

^h Liv. VII, Chap. v.

We have already seen that the principal part of the poetry of the twelfth, and the earlier part of the thirteenth, centuries, consisted of romances or the relation of heroic adventures, tales or narratives of a lighter description, *tensons* or pleas in verse, and *sirventes* or the overflowings of a satirical humour¹. Allegorical poetry was introduced in or near the time of William de Lorris. If the poetical effusions of our European ancestors had always hitherto been works of length, and the age of Froissart and Charles V. gave birth to those shorter and more airy productions of fancy, where the sense of the author is shut up within the compass of a few lines, this would give a further distinctness to the eras of modern poetical history, pleasing to the imagination, and perspicuous and helpful to the memory.

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Origin of
the shorter
and more
airy classes
of poetry.

This arrangement however cannot be admitted but with considerable limitation. Song is the native of every country, and almost

Song.

¹ Vol. I, Chap. XI, p. 219.

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Sonnet.

coeval with speech itself. The romances of our minstrels indeed were long histories, consisting often of several hundred stanzas ; and, though sung, must from their length have been performed in a sort of recitative, with scarcely any thing of what we now denominate air. But when, in consequence of the invention of the time-table, air became introduced^k, short pieces of poetry, adapted to that species of musical execution, must have been written. Many examples of this kind of composition are still preserved. The drinking song of Walter Mapes^l is of this sort ; and the song, said to have been sung in parts by Blondel and our Richard I. on a memorable occasion^m, appears to have been a short composition. The Sonnet, which Petrarca raised to such a height of reputation, and which all other European nations have borrowed from the Italian, was the growth of

^k Vol. I, Chap. IX, p. 289.

^l Inserted in Camden, Remains : rythmes.

^m Percy, Reliques of Ancient English Poetry ; Essay on Minstrels, Sect. iv.

the thirteenth century^a. It is not therefore without considerable qualification, that *mignardises*, or the lighter specimens of poetry, can be understood to be the growth of the age of Charles V.

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Froissart's shorter pieces are variously denominated *Laies*, *Virelaies*, *Balades*, *Chants-royaux*, *Pastourelles* and *Rondeaux*. The *Chant-royal* is defined by Pasquier to be a composition upon some religious or devotional subject, comprised in five stanzas of eleven lines each; the last line of all the stanzas, called the *refrain* or burthen, to be the same; and the whole composition closed with a *renvoi* or epilogue, consisting of about five lines, in the nature of a dedication. The origin of this sort of dedication he ascribes to the Floral Games of this age, in which several poets contended for superiority in the art of verse, and the successful candidate received, as a prize, a garland of artificial flowers formed of the precious metals. The

Chant-
royal.

^a Vol. I, Chap. XI, p. 356.

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Balade.

Rondeau.

different pretenders, eager to conciliate the favour of him whose office it was to adjudge the reward, and who was denominated the king of the games, were accustomed to add a supernumerary stanza to their production, consecrated to the celebrating his praise, or deprecating his censure. The *Balade* Pasquier defines to be a *Demi-chant-royal*, or *Chant-royal* on a smaller scale, the stanzas, and sometimes the lines, being of briefer dimension, and the subject less elevated. The *Rondeau* is defined by Johnson^o, and this definition coincides with the example in Pasquier, to consist of "thirteen verses," disposed according to a certain rule, "of which eight have one rhyme, and five another; it is divided into three couplets [he means stanzas], and, at the end of the second and third, the beginning of the *Rondeau* is repeated, in an equivocal sense, if possible." There is a specimen of an ancient *Rondeau* in Ste. Palaye, consisting of a smaller number

* Johnson, Dictionary of the English Language, in voc.

of verses ^P. The *Pastourelle*, as written by CHAP.
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Froissart, of which there is also an example 1382.
Pastourelle.
in Ste. Palaye ^P, is not, like the classes of
poetry already described, subject to any par-
ticular scheme of versification: it is a rural
dialogue or scene, like those of Theocritus
and Virgil, and written in octosyllabic mea-
sure.

If the system of Pasquier were well found-
ed, we should then be supplied with a new
internal evidence, assisting us in arranging
the chronology of Chaucer's works; as in
that case the pieces in which the names of
those schemes of versification enumerated,
by the historian occur, would be ascertained
to belong to the latter part of the poet's life.
I will put together in this place such ex-
amples as offer themselves of the recurrence
of these names. The Roundell is mentioned
in the poem of the Floure and the Lefe, one
of the attendants being introduced who

References
to these
classes of
poetry in
the writ-
ings of
Chaucer.

^P Mémoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions, Tom. XIV :
Notice des Poesies de Froissart, par Ste. Palaye.

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began a Roundel lustily,
And than the company' answer'd all,
With voices swete entun'd and small.

ver. 176.

In like manner, in the Legende of Gode
Women, Chaucer enumerates among his
writings

Many an hymné for your holy daies,
That highten Balades, Rondels, Virelaies :

ver. 422.

And a personage in one of the Canterbury
Tales is spoken of, who of love

made many Layes,
Songés, Complaintés, Roundels, Virelayes.

ver. 11259.

The Bargaret [*bergerette*] or Pastoral, is like-
wise mentioned in the Floure and the Lefe ;
for, as one of the attendants of Diana the
lady of the Leaf, had begun a Roundel, so
a follower of Flora the lady of the Flower,
sang

right womanly

A Bargaret in praising the daisie.

ver. 347.

Some instances however there are which do not exactly accord with Pasquier's hypothesis. The Ballad (as well as the Virelay, an appellation which occurs in Froissart, and has been supposed not to be older than his poems) is named in the poem entitled Chaucer's Dream written on occasion of John of Gaunt's first marriage in 1359. Thus the birds, who hovered about the navy of Cupid,

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on the shippés bounds about
Ysate and song with voyce full out
Ballades and Layes.

ver. 713.

And afterward,

Virelay.

And there toke lodging every knight,
Was none departed of that night;
And some to reden old romances,
Them occupied for their plesances;
Some to make Virelaies and Laies;
And some to other diverse plaies.

ver. 969.

Mr. Tyrwhit conjectures ^a, and perhaps truly,

^a Account of the Works of Chaucer, prefixed to Glossary.

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that a short piece printed in Chaucer's works,
which is as follows, may be taken as an ex-
ample of the Virelay :

ALONE walkyng, in thought plainyng,
And sore sighyng, all desolate ;
Me remembryng of my livyng ;
My deth wishyng, bothe erly' and late :

Infortunate is so my fate,
That, wot ye what ? Out of mesure
My life I hate ; thus desperate,
In soche pore state, do I endure :

Of other cure am I not sure :—
Thus to endure is hard certain.
Suche is my ^rure, I you ensure ;
What créature may have more pain ?

My truthe so plain is take in vain,
And grete ^s disdain in remembraunce.
' Yet I full faine would me complaine
Me to abstaine from this penaunce,

^r use, habitual situation.

^s displeasure cherished against me.

^t I believe Chaucer wrote this couplet thus :

Yet I full faine would me abstaine

Thus to complaine in this penaunce.

But ^u in substaunce none allegeaunce
 Of my grevaunce can I not finde;
 Right so my chaunce ^x with displeasaunce
 Doeth me avaunce: And thus an ende.

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This piece seemed to deserve to be inserted at length on account of the happy vein of nature, simplicity and pathos, that pervades it: and it would have been scarcely just to have closed the analysis of Chaucer's poems, without producing one specimen of his manner of exhibiting his talent in these briefer and lighter species of composition.

Froissart is one of those eminent literary characters who might have been mentioned in a former chapter, the patronage of whom did especial credit to the judgment and liberality of Edward III. and his queen ^y.

Another eminent French poet contemporary with Chaucer, is William de Machaut,

William de
 Machaut.

^u no substantial relief.

^x drives me on from misfortune to misfortune.

^y Chronique de Froissart.

CHAP. XLIV. whose life has been written by count Caylus^z.

1382. Like Froissart, he was a writer of Chançons-royaux, Ballads, Laies and Virelaies; and, if we had an opportunity of studying his works, which have never been printed, we might perhaps find that he was the inventor of several of these shorter kinds of metrical composition, as well as of the worship of the daisy, which is commemorated in his writings. He was a native of Champagne, and was born certainly earlier than the year 1290. He tells us of himself that he was thirty years secretary to John king of Bohemia, the blind sovereign who was killed in the battle of Cressy in 1346, and from whose device, found on that occasion, the princes of Wales, from Edward the Black Prince, have taken their crest of three ostrich feathers with its motto. William de Machaut, with a constancy of affection which claims our highest respect, took every occasion, to the latest hour of his life, of celebrating the worth and

^z Memoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions, Tom. XX.

accomplishments of his royal patron. This poet is judged by his biographer to have been a person of some rank; and one of his pieces is descriptive of his amours with a princess, which he professes himself reluctant thus to expose to the world, but which he has related in obedience to her express injunction. Another of his productions is entitled *Le Dit du Lion*, and was perhaps the original of Chaucer's poem, entitled the Book of the Lion^a, now lost. As Chaucer was several times in France, it is not improbable that he was personally acquainted with a poet so celebrated in his time as William de Machaut appears to have been. One of Machaut's longest works was written after 1370, and must therefore have been composed when he was more than eighty years of age^b.

On the eighth of May Chaucer received, in addition to his office of comptroller of the

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Chaucer
appointed
comptroller of
the small
customs.

^a Lydgate, Fall of Princes, Prologue, stanza 46. Retraction, annexed to the Canterbury Tales. Tyrwhit, note in loc.

^b Le Beuf, Notice Sommaire de Deux Volumes de Poesies, apud Memoires de l'Académie des Inscriptions, Tom. XX.

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customs upon wools and skins introduced into the port of London, a further grant of the office of comptroller of small customs in the same port, to be discharged by himself or a sufficient deputy of his own appointment^c. This boon we may suppose to have been conferred upon him at the request of Anne of Bohemia, and to have been the pledge by which she engaged him in her service, and constituted him her poet.

^c Appendix, No.

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RICHARD II. ASSUMES THE GOVERNMENT.—HIS
CONFIDENTIAL MINISTERS.—SIR SIMON BURLEY.
—VERE EARL OF OXFORD.—SIR MICHAEL DE LA
POLE.—THEIR PRODIGALITY AND AMBITION—
THEIR ANIMOSITY TO THE KING OF CASTILLE.

RICHARD II. being now a husband, and installed in the faculties and immunities of a man, it was natural that he should be eager to put a close to his period of pupilage. The government had been hitherto of a nature anomalous and difficult to be defined: there had been no regent; the king appears often to have presided in person in the councils of state; and, as there was no individual delegated to represent him, he was habituated on solemn occasions to personate the functions of royalty, and to be set forth to public view as if he were essentially a

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1382. king. He was tutored to speak the words which were dictated to his youthful organs, and to assume the gestures of authority or of grace. Thus he was in a certain sense, no very substantial one indeed, educated to reign ; and it would perhaps appear to himself and to those about him an easy gradation for him to slide from the exhibition, to the direct exercise, of sovereign authority. This change could not have been more favourably prepared than by the part which he had spontaneously taken during the late insurrection.

In the autumn of the year rendered memorable by these convulsions, the parliament which sat at Westminster, and whose proceedings had been disturbed by the dissensions of John of Gaunt and the earl of Northumberland, trod in the steps of their predecessors in treating the king as a minor. Among various measures adopted by them, they named Richard Fitz-Alan, earl of Arundel and one of the committee of government appointed by the Good Parliament, and sir Michael de la Pole, to be about the king's person for council in governing him ; and

nominated sir Richard le Scrope, a man of CHAP.
XLV. character and unblemished reputation and a friend of Chaucer, to be chancellor of the realm^a. 1382. This statesman had in a former instance occupied this high station, and, at the time when the clergy were excluded from the great offices of government on parliamentary petition, had been appointed lord treasurer. One of the first acts of personal authority of Richard II. on record, is the taking the seals from sir Richard le Scrope in July of the present year^b.

Sir Richard le Scrope dismissed from the office of chancellor.

This monarch is one of the most unfortunate in the catalogue of our English sovereigns. He was beautiful in his person, magnificent in his temper, and courageous in the bent of his dispositions. But he was wayward, fickle and headstrong. His fickleness however by no means influenced him in his personal attachments. His persevering affection to Anne of Bohemia his queen, and to Robert Vere his favourite companion and

Early character of Richard II.

His affectionate temper.

^a Cotton, ad ann.

^b Rymer, 6 Ric. 2, Jul. 11.

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confident, may place him among the most distinguished models of entire friendship and love. He was a faithful associate and a blameless husband. To each of the persons just named he manifested a perfect and unalterable attachment in life and after their death. When his queen was no more, he deserted and demolished the palace of Shene in which she expired, leaving its magnificent ruins a striking monument of the sincerity and constancy of his love^c. And, when his favourite died in banishment in the Netherlands, he indulged himself in the luxury of bringing over to England his remains; and resolved at least to shed the tears of affection at the funeral of the man, whose society the resentment of contending factions, and the favourite's excesses and crimes, would not permit him to enjoy while he lived^d. This funeral appears to have taken place three years after the death of Vere, and above eight subsequently to the time of his banish-

^c Hollinshead and Stow, A. D. 1394.

^d Walsingham, A. D. 1395.

ment : if therefore we cannot applaud the judgment, the conduct, or the firmness of Richard, we shall at least be constrained to acknowledge in him some of the attributes which are most lovely in man.

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He was however in several of the most memorable situations of his reign singularly fickle and wayward. In the conduct which his reason dictated to him he was altogether without perseverance. He was through life the sort of being we are accustomed to figure to ourselves as a spoiled child ; so true a lover of indulgence and ease, that, with whatever spirit he entered upon an arduous undertaking, the first difficulty discouraged, or the first temptation seduced him from his course. He had no just sense of the dignity of a resolute spirit, or the beauty of virtuous discrimination. He was therefore a most apt tool in the hands of courtiers, to accomplish their crooked designs or to gratify their unlicensed ambition, to oppress the brave or to lay snares for the incorrupt and sincere. These were the qualities which effected his ruin. In times so factious and turbulent as those in

Imbecility
of his dis-
position.

CHAP. which he lived, no man could tranquilly en-
XLV. joy the highest station in society, without
 1382. some features of character which should com-
 mand personal respect and awe.

Advantages
 with which
 he began
 his career.

It is impossible to say exactly what cir-
 cumstance in the early history of Richard
 was the first cause of his unhappy catastrophe.
 He had before him what may with sufficient
 propriety be styled excellent models, in his
 father and grandfather. His mother, who
 lived till he was in his nineteenth year, was
 of a character to command the respect of
 her contemporaries and posterity. His queen
 was always blameless and always popular ;
 and, judging from the partiality she dis-
 played for the principles of Wicliffe, we
 may conclude that she was not deficient in
 activity and vigour of mind^c.

His educa-
 tion.

Some historians have insinuated that the
 uncles of the king took care that his intel-
 lectual powers should derive no advantage
 from the discipline of an enlightened and

^c Lewis, Life of Wicliffe, Chap. X. Sect. v.

manly education. But this seems to be merely a conjecture, resting upon no foundation of fact. He had for the governor of his youth sir Guichard Dangle earl of Huntingdon, who died in the close of the preceding year^f, and whom we have seen to have been a man of uncommon endowments, and high moral and military character. This nobleman might neglect the duties of his function, and, by an injudicious indulgence, so easily insinuating itself into the direction of a youth of the highest rank, have ruined the temper of his pupil's mind: but he was not a man to be chosen for that express purpose.

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Two of the individuals who engrossed most of the intercourse of Richard, and to whom he was considerably, though not equally, attached, were sir Simon Burley, and Robert Vere earl of Oxford. They were persons who, at least in a superficial view, were every way proper for the confidence which they enjoyed. The former of these was the ne-

His confi-
dential mi-
nisters.

Sir Simon
Burley.

^f Froissart, Chap. lxxix.

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phew of Walter Burley, one of the most eminent schoolmen of the age, and who had been successively concerned in the education both of Edward III.^s and of the Black Prince^h. Sir Simon had himself been brought up from his childhood as the companion and fellow student of the hero of Poitiers, and was particularly recommended by the illustrious warrior in the close of his life, to be about the person of his son^h. No choice could appear to be more happy. Sir Simon Burley had gained reputation in the wars of Edward III, was regarded as a man of the strictest integrity and honour, and must have been impressed with a sort of hereditary attachment to the youthful king. As having been the fellow student of the Black Prince, he must be understood to have been nearly of the same standing in life, and, at the period we are considering, to have arrived at the age of fifty. His experience therefore qualified him for a monitor, while the relation in which

^s Vol. II, Chap. XIX, p. 92. ^h Hollinshed, A. D. 1377.

he had stood to the deceased warrior gave him the weight and tenderness as of a kinsman. The gravity of his years might well have induced a belief, that he was too old to sacrifice the honours of a well spent life, and that even the beams of royal favour and all-conquering ambition would not have the power to dissolve his integrity. The attachment however of sir Simon Burley was of no advantage to Richard. He forgot what he owed to his first friend, the associate of his boyish pursuits, and who had intrusted to him his dearest pledge on earth. He entered into the cabals of the youthful courtiers and forwarded their sinister and unlicensed projects, that together with them he might govern the kingdom without censor or control; at the same time that by a strange inconsistency he involved his master in unpopularity and odium by the pride of his temper, and the unbending stateliness of his demeanourⁱ.

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ⁱ Walsingham, A. D. 1388. Stow, A. D. 1381.

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Vere earl of
Oxford.

Vere, the coadjutor of sir Simon Burley, and who was emphatically the favourite of Richard, was the lineal representative of one of the oldest families in the kingdom. His ancestor had been created earl of Oxford in the time of king Stephen, and the intermediate possessors of the title were, several of them, men of distinguished merit. One of the dangers to be apprehended in the youth of a person of exalted station, is that he should fall into the society of low persons, who should have no other principle than to flatter his caprices and pamper his appetites. In this point of view it seemed to be advantageous that Richard should have for his confident a young man of high rank, and only five years older than himself^k. But the event proved otherwise. Vere did not degenerate from the gallant spirit of his race, and was perhaps not without attachment to his sovereign. He was a young man of high spirit and ambition, but of slender capacity.

^k Dugdale, Baronage, art. Vere.

He felt the advantage he possessed in the absolute control of his sovereign, and was resolved hardily to overstep every inferior obstacle which might oppose the gratification of his inclinations. He sought to combine the discordant characters of the voluptuary and the statesman. Under a gay countenance, open, confident and assured, he masked the thoughts of a conspirator and an assassin. There is a considerable resemblance between Vere the favourite of Richard, and Carr the minion of James I: with these advantages in favour of the former, that he was of an ancient family, and Carr an upstart; and that it was natural that a young man of twenty should obtain the ascendancy over a boy of fifteen, but exceedingly preposterous that he should engross the same degree of empire over a royal pedant of the age of fifty.

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A third statesman was called to share the secret councils of the stripling monarch. This was no other than sir Michael de la Pole, who had contrived to be joined by the parliament of the preceding autumn with the

Sir Michael
de la Pole.

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the realm, as a proper person to superintend the royal councils. He was the son of the opulent merchant formerly mentioned, who had ruined himself by his loans to Edward III. in his wars¹. That monarch, as some compensation to the father, had taken the youth under his protection ; and sir Michael appears to have served with credit during several campaigns. He was a man of ability, calculation and industry ; infected neither with the pride of sir Simon Burley, nor the rash and extravagant confidence of the earl of Oxford. He believed that, while he connected himself with these two men, he could take advantage of the defects of each, and use them both as tools for the attainment of his ends. Having no passions himself, he was cautious and inflexible in the pursuit of his purposes ; and being greatly inferior to his associates in insinuation and accomplishments, he readily yielded to them the

¹ Vol. I, Chap. I, p. 16.

immediate kindness of Richard, provided he were admitted to a full share of the benefits to be extorted from that kindness.

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These three courtiers immediately exposed themselves to general hatred, by their eagerness to share the spoils of government. Sir Michael de la Pole, a few months after the dismissal of Scrope, took upon him the office of chancellor^m. Sir Simon Burley obtained for himself, his father and his nephew, the honorary distinction of the order of the Garter. Upon him and his father this badge must have been conferred in the present year; since he appears in the catalogue of knights as the senior of the two, and his father died in the year followingⁿ. Vere obtained in mar-

Their of-
fensive
proceed-
ings.

^m Rymer, 6 Ric. 2, Mar. 10.

ⁿ In Vol. I, Chap. XIX, I have spoken of the three Burleys, knights of the Garter, as nephews of Dr. Walter Burley, the Perspicuous Schoolman. I here take the opportunity of correcting this error, from some memorandums, collected, and obligingly communicated to me, by the reverend James Dalaway, of the Heralds' College, who has obtained a grant to bear the arms of the Burleys, as being descended from them in the female line. From his collections it appears that sir John Burley, 78th knight of the Garter, was the brother of

CHAP. riage the grand-daughter of Edward III. by
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Isabella countess of Bedford, his eldest daughter; yet, not contented with this splendid alliance, he shortly after, to the great scandal of the nobility and princes of the blood royal, put her away, that he might marry a Bohemian, a woman of plebeian extraction and an attendant upon the queen^o. He also received a grant of Queenborough Castle^p, a palace which had been especially built for Edward III. by William of Wykeham^q.

Their pernicious counsels.

The history of bad ministers who have gained possession of the confidence of a young and thoughtless monarch has been an hundred times related, and in its principal circum-

the doctor, and died in 1383; that sir Simon, 75th knight of the Garter, was the eldest son of sir John; and sir Richard, 80th knight of the Garter, his grandson, by sir Roger his second son. Sir Richard Burley was in the expedition of John of Gaunt to Spain in 1386, was appointed by him marshal of the field, and lost his life at the siege of Arpent in 1389. In this connection with the nephew, we are presented with an additional example of the placable temper of the king of Castille.

^o Walsingham, A. D. 1387. ^p Dugdale, ubi supra.

^q Lowth, Sect. 1.

stances is always the same. The present advisers of Richard II. had many purposes of their own into which they could not expect their master zealously to enter, and were satisfied that he should give as little attention as possible to public affairs. The principal lesson they enjoined upon him in this respect was, that it would be degrading in him to brook restraint, or to listen to the grave and unpalatable suggestions either of the parliament, of his uncles, or of the experienced statesmen who had served under his father and grandfather. They told him that his was the age of pleasure, and urged him to seize the passing hour. They enumerated the advantages he enjoyed, of youth, and health, and a station which they represented as above control. The earl of Huntingdon his governor, it may be, had urged upon him his duties, and exhorted him to the cultivation of his mind; had painted to him the necessity of patience and self-denial, of inuring his body to hardships, and his understanding to strict and unwearied application. These were the lessons of grey hairs, eager to deprive

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others of the pleasures they were themselves unable to enjoy. He might well leave the cares of state to his friends, and would do wisely to regard business and affairs as irksome intruders. He would sufficiently discharge what he owed to his station, if by the splendour of his state he inspired his subjects with awe and admiration, and foreigners who visited his court, with respect.

Prodigality
of the
youthful
monarch.

These lessons found a ready listener in the youthful Richard. Stories of insulting language are related of him toward his parliaments, which, though perhaps exaggerated, may be admitted as evidences of the bent of his demeanour. In the mean time the profusion of his establishment was such as to excite the astonishment of every beholder. Some particulars of this nature have been handed down to us with a characteristic simplicity by a rhymers of the fourteenth century who has already been quoted^r. From his account it appears that ten thousand was the

^r Hardyng, Chap. 194.

usual number of the persons who dined in the royal houshold, whose messes were served out to them by three hundred attendants. The chambermaids and laundresses were to the number of three hundred. Richard also took a pride in the rich array of his retainers and followers, which was much more costly than before or since his time. He seems to have felt a particular pleasure in the attendance of prelates and clergymen, whom, according to the author we are quoting, he assembled from England, Ireland, France and Bohemia; men who had little skill in their discourses to expound high matters of religion, or in music honourably to advance the service of God, but who surpassed the military, and the unsanctified frequenters of the court, in adultery and all the arts of female seduction.

It particularly belonged to the king of Castille to check this dishonourable and licentious riot. We may imagine with what thoughts he contemplated the new and unusual character that was growing up in the English court. England was his country;

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Situation of
the king
of Cas-
tille.

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and so truly did he feel it to be such, that he was long after quoted as the model of an English character. Plantagenet was his name; and, as every thing affects the human heart more deeply, the more nearly it approaches to ourselves, we may be certain that he was singularly anxious for the virtue and prosperity of the representative of his house. In Richard he saw all that survived of his father and his elder brother; and we might have believed, even if he had not a thousand times protested it, that he was ready to make any sacrifice to the interest of his nephew. The king of Castille had been, and still was, magnificent and expensive: but his disbursements were in a very different style from those of Richard. In every thing he consulted his ideas of propriety; his expences were directed to ends of dignity, and regulated by his conceptions of public usefulness. The expences of Richard were wild and wasteful, calculated to breed contempt and not respect, and inspiring into the spectators, as is evident from all the writers of that age, a deep and galling sense of the

Nature of
his mag-
nificence.

compared
with that
of Ri-
chard.

public burthens by which the royal prodigality was sustained. Richard assembled round him from every profession and class in society the persons who were the disgrace of that profession and class : John of Gaunt, by his munificence and the liberality of his disposition, assembled round him those who for their talents and acquirements were the wonders of their age, the bishop of Limoges, the Franciscan philosopher who perished in the late insurrection, Wicliffe and Chaucer.

The king of Castille was the individual whom every circumstance pointed out as him to whom it belonged to save the king and the kingdom from the calamities into which they were about to be plunged : his age, his quality of eldest uncle to Richard, his experience, his high military character, and the political station he had held during the last ten years of Edward III, when he had been in almost every thing but name the regent of the kingdom. Even his want of ambition, which by some historians has been denominated want of enterprise, rendered him

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CHAP. fitter for the task which now seemed to de-
 XLV. volve to him.

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 Animosity
 of the
 king's
 favourites
 against
 him.

But, if he were the individual in England to whom it belonged to redress grievances and check abuses, we may easily believe that no persons were quicker to discern this circumstance than the confidential advisers of the deluded Richard. Accordingly, a principal object of their politics was to anticipate the opposition of the king of Castille, and to cripple his efforts. William of Wykeham and the faction which dictated the measures of the Good Parliament had fortunately paved their way to this object; and they pursued it with such industry, as ultimately to endeavour by a public trial and execution to remove the individual whose virtues they feared. We shall speedily have occasion to relate their machinations.

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PROGRESS OF WICLIFFE.—TRANSLATION OF THE
BIBLE.—CONTROVERSY OF THE REAL PRESENCE.
—POLICY OF THE KING OF CASTILLE.—OF
COURTENAY ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.—
WICLIFFE EXPELLED THE UNIVERSITY.—TEMPER
OF THE KING OF CASTILLE ILLUSTRATED.

AN important crisis was this year brought CHAP.
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on in English affairs by the contentions which
arose respecting the tenets of Wicliffe. We
have seen the first strenuous attempt which
was made to crush the spirit of religious in-
novation in the last year of the reign of Ed-
ward III. An injunction had been framed
by the English hierarchy, forbidding the fur-
ther dissemination of the doctrines of this
celebrated reformer. But the injunction had
been issued under circumstances particularly

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unfavourable to its efficacy ; and the intrepid spirit of Wicliffe taught him to regard it with contempt.

1377.
Bulls of
pope Gre-
gory XI.

The clergy however, and Courteney bishop of London in particular, were not to be diverted from their purpose. To give additional solemnity to their further proceedings, they applied to the pope ; they transmitted to him nineteen heretical and erroneous propositions, really and pretendedly drawn from the writings of Wicliffe^a, and obtained in return five bulls, addressed to the archbishop of Canterbury, to the bishop of London, to Edward III. who was still living, and to the university of Oxford, and having for their object the suppression of the opinions of Wicliffe, the imprisoning him, the compelling him to renounce his errors, and the citing him personally to appear before the sovereign pontiff^a. These bulls were dated on the twenty-second of May ; and, having arrived in England about the period of the old king's

^a Walsingham, A. D. 1378.

death, the solemn public proceedings upon them were deferred till the following spring. CHAP.
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The further the prosecution against Wicliffe was urged, the more evident did it become how deeply his tenets had taken root in England. The heads of the university of Oxford came to a solemn deliberation whether the bull directed to them should be received with honour, or rejected with disgrace; nor does it appear that it ever was received. The monastic writers, astonished at the audacity and irreverence of the university on this occasion, suddenly break off their narrative, professing themselves unwilling to remember, against an institution meriting so highly of the Christian world, a scene so little worthy of its general character for orthodoxy and catholicism^b.

Wicliffe was a second time summoned to appear before the heads of the church of England at Lambeth in the beginning of 1378^c; 1377.
Wicliffe favoured by the university of Oxford.

1378.
Cited before the bishops at Lambeth.

^b Walsingham, and Wood, Antiq. Oxon. A. D. 1378.

^c Walsingham, A. D. 1378.

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1378.

His popu-
larity.

rotected by
he prin-
cess of
Wales.

and, from the time of the year in this as well as the former instance, we seem authorised to conclude that his judges were the upper house of convocation. It is not very certain whether he obeyed on this occasion the citation he received. The populace of London appear to have been strongly prepossessed in his favour; though, in the obscure and improbable story which is related of the preceding year, they are represented as having committed various excesses against his patrons and abettors. They now besieged the house in which his prosecutors were assembled, and some of them, having forced the doors and obtained entrance, began to harangue the prelacy in his favour. In the midst of this confusion sir Lewis Clifford, a gentleman of the houshold to the dowager princess of Wales, arrived, and delivered a verbal order from his mistress, forbidding the bishops to proceed to any definitive sentence against Wicliffe^d. Perplexed at once by the

^d Walsingham, ad ann.

tumultuous cries of the populace, and this equivocal and extraordinary interposition of authority, the meeting broke up abruptly without coming to any decision. News of the death of pope Gregory XI. immediately after arrived, and superseded further proceedings, by putting an end to the authority upon which they were founded. It was on occasion of the death of pope Gregory, that what is known in ecclesiastical history by the name of the Grand Schism commenced, two or more pretenders constantly advancing their claim to the papal throne; an anarchy which was not terminated till forty years after, by the council of Constance.

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1378.

Grand
Schism.

This sort of inefficient and impotent persecution was not calculated to overawe the intrepid spirit of Wicliffe: it on the contrary tended to encourage his efforts. It is of the nature of all bold and irregular attempts at reformation, to destroy in their authors and abettors the habitual respect which had previously prevailed for the authorities they would reform. The expression of disapprobation and censure is not adapted to arrest

Favourable
situation
of Wic-
liffe.

CHAP. XLVI.
 1378. their progress. This rather affords them food for exultation, and countenances them in the opinion they had previously cherished, that the established authorities are grown feeble and powerless.

He resolves
 to im-
 prove it.

A variety of circumstances now favoured the career of Wicliffe: the schism of the church, the countenance he had received from the great, and the open favour which his doctrines obtained from the multitude. The hierarchy of the church of England had attempted to suppress his principles, and had been found incompetent. In the interval which he thus obtained, the great reformer began seriously to meditate respecting the next enterprise in which he should engage. He would have deemed himself a criminal deserter from the cause of God and of truth, if he had suffered so favourable an opportunity to pass unimproved. He was not regardless of that great principle in mankind collectively considered, that in daring and difficult enterprises all pause is fatal; and that, if we would act successfully upon the passions, we must hurry on our adherents

from point to point, continually reserving some new surprise, and from time to time resorting to this great instrument for keeping alive and exalting their fervour. Nothing can more strikingly illustrate the magnitude of Wicliffe's genius than the measures in which he now engaged.

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1378.

The first of these, which he had for some time meditated, and which must have cost him no inconsiderable period in the execution, was the translation of the Bible. The success of his efforts was fated to depend upon popular impression; and nothing could be more exactly adapted to his purpose, than to lay before the whole people of England the materials which would enable them to judge between him and his antagonists. It was accident which had deprived the Christian world of the power of consulting the volumes which contained the records of their religion. The language in which those volumes principally existed at present, the Latin, had insensibly become a dead language; even the arts of writing and reading had gradually declined, and existed only in the

1380.

Translation
of the
Bible.

CHAP.
XLVI.

1380.

possession of a few. But, though this withholding of the key of knowledge from the public at large was at first accidental, the clergy were not slow to perceive their advantage in it. While the sacred writings were accessible to all, every man was in some measure his own priest. Now the clergy had every thing in their power. They might teach whatever they pleased, or was best adapted to their interests, without fear of contradiction. All astonishment, all mysteries, all menace, were at their disposal; and, as far as the hopes of heaven and the fears of damnation had influence upon mankind, their empire was unbounded and absolute.

No two things could be more forcibly contrasted than the religion of the Holy Catholic church and the religion of the New Testament: the one all pomp and decoration, a gigantic system of policy, such as the world had never seen, stretching its mighty arms over all Christian states, terrifying the people, and dictating to their rulers; the other humble, naked and undowered, its teachers

without a roof to cover them, and its temper spiritual and abstracted from the temptations and advantages of this sublunary scene. The vulgar may, no doubt, be so trained as to find in every thing what their instructors dictate, to overlook contradictions, and to receive all absurdities as infallible truth. But for this purpose it is perhaps necessary that they should be accustomed from their infancy to the writings which are thus to be distorted, and that the sounds should be familiar before the sense can become a subject of enquiry. The sacred writings were now new to the Christian flock of the English pale; and, illustrated by the commentaries of Wicliffe and his associates, would not slide upon the ear so quietly, without impression and animadversion, as they might otherwise have done.

The preaching of Wicliffe and his coadjutors was one incessant labour, unacquainted with either rest or fatigue. They passed from parish to parish and from county to county, every where instructing, informing and exhorting all who would listen to their dis-

CHAP.
XLVI.
1380.

Exertions
of Wic-
liffe and
his asso-
ciates.

CHAP.
XLVI.

1380. courses. They were clad, we are told, in the coarsest attire, and travelled barefoot^d; circumstances designed to be emblematical of the holy simplicity of the doctrines they taught. Men came to mock them; but went away struck to the heart, overawed, humbled and converted. It is notorious what effects were produced by the Methodistical teachers of the eighteenth century. But the preachers of reformation at the time of which we treat, were of a totally different class. They were masters of all the zeal and popular declamatory vein of their successors. Their zeal however was a deeper and more vigorous principle, as being combined with strong original powers of mind. At the same time that they arrested the attention and commanded the passions of the vulgar, they challenged the most refined to the contest; and it seems to be generally admitted that no one was found able to cope with them in the field of argumentation. Though the

^d Walsingham, A. D. 1377.

multitude are not qualified to be direct judges of the higher powers of intellect, and though they are often made the dupes of loquacious effrontery, yet there is something in true genius and sterling merit which, when skilfully employed for that purpose, will produce a more powerful and extraordinary effect even upon them, than ignorant assurance can ever reach.

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XLVI.

1380.

Wicliffe's translation of the Bible appears to have been published in the year 1380^e: the following year witnessed a new assault made by him upon the established church^f; it was directed against the doctrine of transubstantiation. This is the most extraordinary dogma in the history of human opinions; teaching that the bread which is eaten and the wine which is drunk under certain circumstances, are neither bread nor wine, but are strictly, literally and substantially, the flesh of the body of the man Jesus Christ, and the blood which he shed on the cross.

1381.

Controversy
of the real
presence.

^e Lewis, Chap. V.

^f Wood, ad ann.

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XLVI.

1381.

Other mysteries may contain in them contradictions not less direct than this ; but a doctrine which thus openly opposes the evidence of almost every one of our senses, has something in it which demanded a greater degree of ignorance and effrontery than any of these to gain it admission into the creed of mankind. Yet it is of the nature of a mystery of faith, that, when once it has obtained reception, the more gross and absurd it is, the more strenuously it is embraced, as affording a sublimer exercise for the imagination, and a more striking opportunity for the exertion of religious humility and submission. We might fancy that this, being a merely theoretical proposition, would excite little enthusiasm and zeal in its advocates. But the clergy understood their interests better. This has always, and justly, been regarded as a corner-stone of the Roman Catholic religion ; the great triumph of faith, the test of a truly pious disposition in its adherents. It is of the highest importance, for the pride of human understanding to be subdued at the footstool of the church. The

Romish hierarchy well knew, that he who had once in a truly devout temper received the doctrine of the real presence, might be considered as a pupil well disciplined and prepared to become a passive instrument in the hands of his religious superiors. The consideration however which made this doctrine dear to the Romish clergy, and fastened it upon the affections of the multitude, had no charms for Wicliffe. He came with a severe eye to spy out abuses; and what spoke only to the heart, and excited a tumult of pious emotions, met with no quarter from him. He was, as we have already said, in temper a puritan; and that poetical and impassioned colouring which changes as it were the face of nature, and causes objects to take their hue less from the mechanical refraction of rays than from the feelings of the spectator, had no place in his creed. Wicliffe undoubtedly in no instance more clearly proved the depth of his views, than in selecting this fundamental doctrine of the church which had passed unquestioned for ages, as the topic of his concluding and decisive as-

C H A P.
XLVI.

1381.

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1381.

Wicliffe op-
posed by
some of the
heads of
the univer-
sity.

sault. The choice which he now made was perhaps the main spring of the reformation which took place one hundred and fifty years later ; but it was too strong an experiment for the time at which it was made. The university of Oxford had hitherto supported Wicliffe in all his trials ; it was considered as the very focus of heresy ; but the attack which he made upon a mystery so sacred and sublime began to startle even his brethren of the university. A decree, condemning the doctrines which he began to propagate respecting the sacrament of the eucharist, and forbidding their further dissemination, was drawn up and signed by the chancellor, and twelve of the doctors, of the university^s. The chancellor immediately re-

^s Wood, ad ann. The name of the chancellor was William de Berton, S. T. P. It was not till the middle of the sixteenth century that the custom was introduced of choosing some person of distinguished rank to bear the appellation of chancellor of the university, while the ecclesiastic who discharged the ordinary functions of the office bore the name of vice-chancellor, Wood, Fasti, apud Antiq. Oxon.

paired with this instrument to the school in which Wicliffe was expounding and maintaining his thesis upon the subject, and notified to him the determination of his superiors. The reformer was at first somewhat astonished ; but, recovering himself, he, in reply to what he had heard, defied this officer or any of his assistants to answer his arguments. The chancellor, having performed the business upon which he came, departed in silence ^h.

CHAP.
XLVI.

1381.

Wicliffe, by way of parrying the attack thus made upon him, signified his intention to appeal from his academical superiors to the king ⁱ. Some of his adversaries reproached him with a confession of the weakness of his cause, in thus referring the question to a secular authority, and owning that he could find no support in the bosom of the church. But in reality he was only following up the consequences of his own principle. The authority of the pope he

1382.

Appeals to
the king.

^h Spelman, Concilia, ad ann.

ⁱ Wood, ad ann.

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XLVI.

1382.

disclaimed, and he knew it was against him.

A great question had been agitated respecting the right of the bishops to interpose their jurisdiction in the university; and Wicliffe was far from being willing, by an appeal to them, to compromise the privileges of the body of which he was a member.

Solicits the
support of
the king of
Castille.

It was the purpose of the reformer to submit his petition to the king in parliament. He knew what a numerous band of adherents he had in England, and he was desirous to have his cause tried in the face of the nation. Knighton, the monkish historian, assures us, that at this time, whoever met two men in the highway, would certainly find one of them to be a Lollard^k. Meanwhile, Wicliffe was sensible that the present was a great crisis in the constitution of the church of England, and that it behoved him to solicit support from every quarter from which he could obtain it. He therefore privately applied to the king of Castille, to whose pa-

^k Knighton, ad ann.

tronage he had already been so deeply indebted, for his support on the present occasion. The answer he received was a most unwelcome one; John of Gaunt advised him to withdraw from these thorny and dangerous contentions, and publicly to avow his submission to his ecclesiastical superiors¹.

CHAP.
XLVI.

1382.
and is re-
fused.

It is somewhat uncertain what was the motive which influenced the king of Castille in the present instance. His own situation was materially altered from what it had been when he so manfully stood forth in the cause of reformation. His political power was little; and the difficulties with which he had to struggle were many. The churchmen of the time had convinced him how deep and unrelenting was their animosity: he had just suffered in the most essential, and the tenderest points, from the excesses of Wat Tyler's insurgents, and the mysterious and distressing hostilities of the earl of Northumberland; and he perhaps foresaw the still

Probable
motives
of this
refusal.

1. The un-
prosper-
ous situ-
ation of
John of
Gaunt.

¹ Wood, ad ann.

CHAP.
XLVI

1382.

blackest storm which was preparing to overwhelm him. Thus circumstanced, it would not be wonderful if he resolved to engage himself no further in the troubled sea of political warfare, or became convinced that, however eminent was his station, he could be of little real service to the man whom he honoured with his patronage.

2. the unhappy dispositions of Richard II.

Another motive which, it may be, influenced the king of Castille's proceeding on this occasion, was consideration for his nephew. We have seen how uniformly loyalty was in his breast one of his main principles of conduct. Richard is said to have been at first no enemy to Wicliffe; he made him his chaplain, and graced him with his royal favour^m. Queen Anne of Bohemia had embraced the principles of the reformer, and, however she might abstain from publicly interfering in his behalf, appears constantly to have adhered to his partyⁿ. Under these circumstances, it seemed a very doubtful point

^m Lewis, Chap. X, Sect. vi. ⁿ Ditto, Sect. v.

whether the court might not openly take up his cause. What would then have been the situation of the young and unthinking sovereign? The whole power of the clergy would from that moment have become marshalled against him. His prospects and his fortune were sufficiently critical without this addition. He made himself enemies by his extravagance, enemies by the prodigal bounties which he heaped upon odious favourites, and enemies by the inconsiderate manner in which he entered into their resentments and conspiracies. By patronising Wicliffe he might bring upon himself sudden and irretrievable ruin; he was not a prince qualified to effect a great and beneficial revolution, or to operate a salutary change in any of the national establishments. John of Gaunt, anxious for his welfare, and that he might not embark in a perilous enterprise which could not come to good, perhaps advised him to stand neuter in the great struggle that impended; and set him the example.

CHAP.
XLVI.

1382.

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1382.
3. the ex-
treme to
which
Wicliffe
proceeded.
which John
of Gaunt
might dis-
approve
from views
of piety,

It is possible also that the king of Castille was himself startled by Wicliffe's attack upon the doctrine of the eucharist. He is said, in speaking afterward of Wicliffe's sentiments upon that subject, to have treated them with considerable asperity as a doctrine of devils°. We find Chaucer also, in his Testament of Love^p, written after this time, expressing himself with reverence of the belief of the real presence. A fixed principle of infidelity was extremely rare in the fourteenth century. The minds of mankind had been too thoroughly subdued under the empire of the church: they could indulge perhaps in a convivial jest or a gay satire upon things they had been taught to consider as sacred; but they could not sustain this profaneness in the prospect of death, nor had the firmness to digest it into an argumentative system. Nothing would seem more shocking in the judgment of a serious believer of that age,

* Wood, ad ann.

* Book II, Chap. ii.

than to tell him that that which he had worshipped as a God was only a mouldy crust ;
 and we ought rather to be surprised that Wicliffe found so many followers in his innovation, than that many regarded it as the excess of impiety.

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XLVI.

1382.

Lastly, John of Gaunt, as we before remarked, embraced the cause of Wicliffe in the spirit of a statesman. He saw how much the incroachments of the church of Rome had trenched upon the integrity of the English government, and he deemed it an object worthy of his efforts to repel and put an end to these incroachments. Perhaps too he felt that the tyranny of the church had been hostile to the vigorous exertions of intellect ; and, as a friend of literature, he desired its reform. Yet, as a statesman, he might hold the doctrine of the real presence too sacred to be disturbed. Religion is nothing, if it stop at a theoretical persuasion of the truth of certain propositions. It must become a vital principle, it must affect the heart and act upon the passions, before it can greatly modify the character of man in so-

or of policy.

CHAP.
XLVI.

1382.

ciety. Hence John of Gaunt might infer the necessity of discountenancing an attempt to strip it of its ornaments and its poetical character, and to reduce it to a mere affair of the understanding.

His humane
and bene-
volent pro-
ceedings.

The conduct of John of Gaunt however on this occasion was conformable to the whole tenour of his life. Though he withdrew from the party of the reformers, he was no indifferent spectator of the persecutions which were carried on against them. He undertook to be the moderator between contending factions, and to repress the excesses of intolerant zeal. In particular, the industrious and elegant cultivators of science and intellect were always sure of his friendship. Dr. Nicholas Hereford, the most refined and virtuous of the adherents of Wicliffe, is said to have “escaped the bitterness of death^a” through the interposition of the king of Castille; and even William de Swinderby, who seems to have been merely an unfortunate

^a Knighton, ubi supra.

maniac, and who, being cited by Bokying-
ham bishop of Lincoln to appear before him
in his cathedral, was adjudged to be "fit fuel
for the fire," owed his life to the accidental
arrival of the same prince, who held among
his various and extensive possessions the
lordship of the castle of Lincoln. No Eng-
lishman was put to death for heresy during
the life of the king of Castille.

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XLVI.

1382.

Wicliffe was not discouraged by the re-
pulse he received from his former patron.
He had been animated by the favour of so
important a personage; but, if that were
withdrawn, he thought he might still rely
upon the extensive party he had formed
among the nobility and the nation at large.
He therefore prosecuted his appeal, and sub-
mitted his cause to the ensuing parliament.

An event in the mean time had occurred
which was of the utmost importance to the
issue of this affair. Archbishop Sudbury, as

Courteney
succeeds
to the
primacy.

^r Knighton, ubi supra.

^s Lewis, Chap. VI.

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1382.

we have seen, fell a victim to the late insurrection: and Courteney bishop of London was appointed to succeed him. He had ever been a most strenuous adversary to these ecclesiastical innovators. Sudbury, though a man of considerable ability, was of so mild and liberal a temper, as to have drawn upon him the imputation of secretly favouring the reformer. But Courteney was bold and enterprising, fond of authority, and disdainful of every obstacle which might restrain him in what he deemed the wholesome use of it. He deplored the long impunity of the men who were rapidly undermining the most ancient and venerable institutions and bringing religion itself into disgrace and contempt, and resolved that the first year of his primacy should be distinguished by the suppression of their daring assaults.

Council
held at the
Preaching
Friars.

He is said to have been restrained for a short time from commencing his operations, by a scruple exactly conformable to that high sense of ecclesiastical authority which was the regulating principle of his conduct. He

was elected archbishop in September 1381^s,
 but it was not till the May of the present year
 that he received from Urban VI. the pall, the
 symbol of the pope's confirming him in his
 office^t. Immediately after this, he summoned
 an extraordinary convocation of the church
 to meet in the convent of the Preaching
 Friars at London, to decide upon the fate of
 Wicliffe and his followers^u. Here twenty-
 four propositions, imputed to Wicliffe, were
 submitted to the consideration of the assem-
 bly; and it was recommended to them to pro-
 nounce some of them heretical, and others
 erroneous.

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XLVI.

1382.

It happened, while these propositions were
 under examination, that the house in which
 the assembly sat was shaken by an earth-
 quake, which was so violent that in Kent it
 is said to have thrown down churches^w.
 Some of the more timid members, appalled
 at this phenomenon, insinuated in murmurs

Earthquake.

^s Godwin, archiepiscopi Cant. cap. LVIII. ^t Lewis, ubi supra.

^u Spelman, Concilia, ad ann.

^w Stow, ad ann.

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XLVI.

1382.

that it ought to be considered as a token that God was displeased with the business in which they were engaged. Courteney however rose in the midst of the commotion with a grave and animated countenance, and rebuked their scruples, observing that the earthquake ought rather to be interpreted as a divine signification of the downfall of heresy, and the purging the kingdom of pestilential errors^x. Wicliffe, though thus formidably attacked, and though he was now nearly sixty years of age, showed that his spirit was not subdued, and amused himself with ridiculing the measures adopted by this body, which he called "the Counsaile of Freres in London with the Herydene," or hurricane^y.

Parliamentary bill
against heresy.

Such measures having been adopted in this assembly as the judgment of the archbishop suggested, a bill was immediately after brought into parliament^z, doubtless at his

^x Lewis, ubi supra.

^y Knighton, ad ann.

^z Cotton, 5 R. 2.

instigation, to empower the sheriffs in the different counties, at the requisition of the bishops, to apprehend the preachers of heresy, and their favourers and abettors, and to hold them in strong prison till they should be justified according to the law and reason of holy church. This bill did not pass the commons^a. It is sufficiently remarkable however that, notwithstanding this defect, it was entered as law upon the records; and that, though the commons in the following parliament remonstrated against the fraud, declaring that it was never their intention to bind themselves to the prelates further than their ancestors had done^a, yet this bill, which never had any legal authority, remains to the present day on the statute-book^b.

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XLVI.

1382.

rejected by
the commons.

Courteney, having thus laid the foundation for compulsory measures, resolved not to leave these determinations in church and state a dead letter, as his predecessor had done.

Courteney undertakes to purge the university.

^a Cotton, 6 R. 2.

^b Statutes at Large, 5 Ric. 2, Stat. 2, cap. 5.

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XLVI.

1382.

opposed by
the chan-
cellor.

forces him
to submit.

demands a
recantation
from the
heretical
professors.

Oxford had long been considered as the focus of heresy. The chancellor indeed of the preceding year had taken some measures against Wicliffe; but he was now out of office, and his successor [Dr. Robert Rigge], as well as the majority of the members of the university, were favourable to the reformer. Courteney wrote to this officer, requiring him to silence one of the professors who was an adherent of Wicliffe^c; but the chancellor, under pretence that the archbishop had no jurisdiction in the university, declined obeying the requisition. Courteney summoned Rigge to appear before him in London; and the chancellor found it necessary to comply. He however again rebelled, and again was brought up to the metropolis. The archbishop also summoned before him the principal Oxford teachers of the new doctrines, and proposed to them the alternative of recantation or imprisonment; to the former of which they are said to have submitted: not

^c Wood, ad ann.

at first indeed ; for it appears from the ecclesiastical records, that, of the three heretics, Hereford, Repyndon and Ashton, cited before archbishop Courteney at an adjourned sitting of the convocation at the Preaching Friars, on the twentieth of June, the two former returned modified answers concerning the doctrines in debate, which were declared to be unsatisfactory ; and the last replied in a style of buffoonery, expressive of the contempt he entertained for the primate's authority and character^d. Courteney further obtained from the king, who, immersed in the pleasures procured for him by his favourites, was willing by this sacrifice to procure the toleration of the church to his irregularities, letters patent addressed to the university, requiring them, within seven days from the receipt of this injunction, to banish Wicliffe and his adherents from Oxford, and to suppress all books and writings favourable to the new heresy^e. Letters patent were also ad-

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1382.

Letters patent against heresy.

Wicliffe is expelled the university.

^d Spelman, Concilia, ad ann. ^e Rymer, 6 Ric. 2, Jul. 6.

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1382.

Convoca-
tion of St.
Frides-
wide.

dressed to the bishops in their dioceses, authorising them forthwith to arrest all who should maintain privately or publicly the propositions condemned at the Preaching Friars, and to detain them in prison till they should have repented of their heresies^f. Lastly, Courteney held a convocation of his clergy toward the end of the year at the monastery of St. Frideswide near Oxford, where he again obtained an abjuration of their errors from those professors and others who had before complied with that requisition in London^g. The result of all these proceedings of the zealous primate was, that the voice of heresy was no more publicly heard in the university.

Obscurity
respecting
the recant-
ations.

It is not easy to determine who were and who were not the recanting parties on this occasion. By the monkish historians Wicliffe is represented as having been one. But this is by no means certain. Knighton, one of these historians, has inserted a paper, which

^f Lewis, ubi supra.

^g Wood, ad ann.

he calls a recantation written by Wicliffe; CHAP.
XLVI.
 but this paper, instead of being what it is
 styled, affirms in the most express terms the
 new doctrine in opposition to that of the real
 presence. It is not improbable that he was
 offered the alternative of retiring to his living
 of Lutterworth, where we know that he spent
 the rest of his days. He survived his expul-
 sion from Oxford only two years. The ma-
 jority of the teachers of the new doctrines
 appear to have recanted. The different fate
 of the two who after Wicliffe were the most
 considerable, Dr. Nicholas Hereford and Dr.
 Philip Repyndon, is sufficiently memorable.
 Hereford obstinately refused to retract his
 opinions, but at length consented to shut
 himself up in a convent of Carmelite Friars,
 where he died^h. Repyndon made a full and
 ample recantation, and in process of time be-
 came a bishop, a cardinal, and a zealous per-
 secutor of the Lollardsⁱ.

Dr. Nicholas
Hereford.

Dr. Philip
Repyndon.

^h Wood, ad ann.

ⁱ Godwin, Episcopi Lincoln. Lewis, Chap. X, Sect. xxi.

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XLVI.

1382.

Imputed
pusillani-
mity of the
Lollards.

Hume reproaches these early English reformers, that they “seem not to have been actuated by the spirit of martyrdom^j.” It is curious to observe a man distinguished by his indifference to all religion, and of a temper clearly pacific and unenterprising, joining the vulgar cry on this occasion. What satisfaction ought it to afford to an historian or a reader of history, to find that the man who extorted our admiration during life, at last perished by an ignominious and tormenting death? But, putting this out of the question, let us enquire into the conduct which it becomes the reformer himself, actuated by a view to the benefit of mankind, to adopt in this alternative. We admire, and justly, the spirit of the persecuted individual who flinches not an atom before his tormentors, and refuses to qualify by a single syllable what he once maintained as important truth; but we may be permitted to question the wisdom and moral rectitude of his conduct. Death,

^j Chap. XVII.

inflicted by those who are accustomed to decree the execution of the most profligate and noxious members of the community, will always to the general eye appear ignominious. The man who is thus rudely thrust out from the roll of existence, will long be pursued with invective and evil tongues after he is no more. Why should he submit to this, if he can avoid it? It is well for the poor suffering individual if he can persuade himself that his death will be a source of glory and usefulness. But after all, the serenity with which he submits to tortures is no argument. This has as often been seen in the cause of error as of truth: and it is to be wished in every point of view that this mode of persuading bystanders to embrace or reject opinions could be totally proscribed. If he be, which the notion of martyrdom implies, a lover of virtue and of mankind, surely his life, though compelled to silence upon certain topics, will be more beneficial than his death. Plainly and directly speaking, it is only the destruction of persons uncommonly perverse and depraved from which

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1382.

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we should expect advantage to mankind. Why should he put himself upon a level with these? I ought not to sign a paper containing sentiments opposite to my own, to obtain a sum of money or an office; but I would as willingly do this at the requisition of a chief justice as of a highwayman, if, while he grasps the paper in one hand, he presents a halter or a pistol with the other. The man who acts thus toward me I regard as a ruffian, and there is no impropriety in temporising to a certain degree with a person of that sort. Nothing ought to be refused by me when death is the alternative of refusal, except that which would so destroy my character and honour as to make the further prolongation of my life a burthen and a curse.

Commend-
ation of
Wicliffe.

This, which Hume and others have treated as a reproach to the reformers of the fourteenth century, is perhaps an additional proof of the genius of Wicliffe. No humane person can contemplate the fires which were afterward lighted in Smithfield but with inexpressible horror; and, if Wicliffe

by his mode of proceeding postponed those accursed scenes for twenty years, he is in so doing entitled to the thanks of every friend of man. We do not find that the party of the Lollards perished through the sobriety of Wicliffe. We might have found, if Wicliffe had acted otherwise, the persecutions of the fourteenth century more barbarous and sanguinary than those which afterward took place in the sixteenth. Would it not have been possible, if the founders of the Protestant religion had acted with moderation, yielding in a certain degree to the storm but never sacrificing the smallest particle of inward principle and resolution, that the human mind might have broken its shackles in peace, and that the day of truth might have risen unpreceded by those fierce and dreadful tempests which actually ushered in the morn ?

In religious innovation, as in almost all critical postures of human affairs, there is much of good and much of evil. The literature and the mind of Europe are and long will be deeply indebted to Wicliffe, and to

CHAP.
XLVI.

1382.

Right and
wrong of
his gene-
ral sy-
stem.

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1382.

John of Gaunt his patron. They were eminent instruments in removing that night and torpor in which we had so long been involved. But there is a stern and a rugged character in reformation, particularly religious reformation, which we must deplore, while we love the general result. History informs us, and we might easily have concluded that it was so, that Wicliffe and his confederates were copious in their abuse of all preachers who were not of their sect; styling them false brethren, imps of Satan, and warning their followers to give no ear to their doctrines. Sarcasm and invective, stirring up the angry passions of mankind, have almost always been the resources of innovators. We read of an instance in which two of the preachers, being at a loss for wood to boil their provisions, chanced upon a wooden image of St. Catharine; and, chopping it in pieces, jocosely remarked that Providence must have been concerned in sending them so seasonable a supply ^k. They

^k Knighton, ad ann.

familiarly styled Our Lady of Walsingham CHAP.
XLVI.
 (one of the shrines most in honour among 1382.
 the ancient English) the Witch of Walsing-
 ham¹. There is an internal evidence in this
 phrase, which may well guarantee to us that
 it was not the invention of their calumni-
 ators. But the tendency of such licentious
 language must have been, to shock the pious
 and the worthy, and to overturn the prin-
 ciples of the weak and unstable. With the
 unenlightened and unthinking part of man-
 kind, the whole circle of moral principles is
 bound together. They are fastened upon
 them by education, and confirmed by habit.
 Things sacred in themselves, are not sacred
 in their eyes from an intrinsic claim, but as
 connected with time and place, with outward
 ceremonies and solemn observances. It is
 only a virtue founded in principle, and nur-
 tured in the genial soil of a well ordered
 mind, that will survive unhurt, when the
 prejudices upon which it used to lean for

¹ Knighton, ad ann.

CHAP. support are no more. We may therefore
 XLVI.
 1382. reasonably conclude that Wicliffe and his
 partisans did much of at least temporary
 mischief. They disturbed the visions and
 poetic forms of morality and religion. They
 offended the pious; they sapped the virtues
 of the unsteady; and they introduced a ge-
 neral spirit of grossness and illiberal sarcasm.
 We ought not to wonder that they had many
 enemies, nor to believe that all who perse-
 cuted them were actuated by a despotic tem-
 per or by sordid motives.

Temper of
 John of
 Gaunt.

Knighton, to whose history we have had
 repeated occasion to refer, has introduced,
 influenced perhaps by the circumstance of the
 king of Castille withdrawing his patronage
 from Wicliffe^m, some circumstances favour-
 able to the character of that prince, which, as
 having probably a connection with the sen-
 timents of the reformer, cannot be more

^m Knighton was also resident at Leicester, a favourite re-
 treat of the king of Castille, and from that accident was
 likely to know more of his dispositions and habits than the
 herd of his contemporary bigots and slanderers.

properly introduced than in this place. He CHAP.
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1382. calls John of Gaunt "the pious duke:" and then proceeds, "Let no man wonder that I mention him by this appellation. He is well entitled to it, since, in all his trials, the adversities he suffered, and the injuries which were maliciously heaped upon him, he sought no revenge, and gave no instructions for that purpose to persons who would readily have executed his commands, but cheerfully forgave every one who asked his forgiveness. In one instance, the apartment in which his plate was laid up was found to have suffered repeated depredations from certain of his servants or dependents, and, the malefactors being detected, the officers of his establishment to whom according to the customs of the times the local administration of justice belonged, proposed to execute summary justice upon them; but he forbade them to proceed, declaring that he would not consent that any man should be put to death for his goods, and ordering that the offenders should be dismissed, an oath being first exacted from them that they should wholly abstain from

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the family and palace of the king, from his own, and from those of his brothers." Be it observed, that this is the man whom several of his contemporaries represented as possessed with an unbridled ambition, not hesitating to employ poison as the means for obtaining his ends, and indulging in the most brutal excesses; and that these calumnies have been delivered from hand to hand by all the historians who have treated of the times and transactions in which he was concernedⁿ.

ⁿ Even Lowth, who has taken so much pains to blacken the character of the king of Castille the better to justify the intemperance and indecorum of his own hero, confesses [Sect. V.] immediately on mentioning the accession of Richard II, that "he must now have relinquished his designs upon the crown, if he ever really entertained them." A strange time to have abjured so criminal a purpose: when his father and his elder brother, who were most capable of repressing his unlawful ambition, were dead; when the kingdom was exposed to all the evils of a long minority, and was in reality without an administration; and when it was first distracted by a most fearful anarchy, and afterward, through the prodigal and disgraceful measures pursued, totally weaned from all attachment to its sovereign.

I will add here an anecdote of John of Gaunt, more private and familiar in its nature than has ordinarily been preserved of persons living at so remote a period. “There is,” says my author, “in the parish of Ratby in Leicestershire a meadow adjoining to the road from Market-Bosworth to Leicester. Before the fields were inclosed, this meadow belonged to several occupiers of land in the parish. The custom was, to mow their several allotments on a certain day, called ‘the meadow-mowing.’ When the labour of the day was over, the remaining part was spent in wrestlings, foot-balls, cudgel-playing, and other athletic exercises; and the evening with music and dancing on a small eminence in one part of the meadow. It happened, in the latter part of the reign of Edward III, or the beginning of that of Richard II, that John of Gaunt, duke of Lancaster and earl of Leicester, passed by the meadow on his way to Leicester, where he then kept his court, on the day of the Meadow-Mowing, attended only by one servant. Observing mirth and festivity, he alighted from his horse, and

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Anecdote.

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asked the cause of their diversion. They answered, that they had been mowing the meadow according to ancient custom, which was called *Ramsdale*. Having joined them in their diversions, he was so well pleased with their innocent pastimes, that, when he took his leave, he told them, if they would meet him at Leicester, at such a time and place which he appointed, he would give to each of them an *ewe* to his *ram*, and a *wether*, whose *grassy* fleece should annually, when sold, produce them a plentiful repast. There was a consultation immediately held: some said it was only a joke; others that they were determined to know the truth of the matter. Accordingly, about fifteen persons set out for Leicester, and went to the appointed place, where they found the duke, who informed them that, if they would keep certain articles, he would give to each of them a piece or parcel of land, situated in a meadow in the parish of Enderby, adjoining to the river Soar, in the same county, containing by measure half an acre (seven or eight acres in all), for each man's private use, to

be called the *ewes*; also another piece, about five yards wide and fifty or sixty yards long, for each, to be called the *boots* [profits, overplus]: and would likewise give to them a piece or parcel of land for their general use, containing about two acres, and washed on three sides by the river Soar (which in a rainy season is said to 'wash the wether's breech'), to be called the *wether*; the grass crop to be sold annually at Enderby on Whit-Monday to the best bidder, the profits (which of late years have amounted to £. 4) to defray the expences of an annual feast on that day. The conditions of the feast are these: the company is to breakfast in Leicester, at any inn they shall think proper, upon a *calf's-head*, the bones of which are to be served up in a platter as one of their dishes at dinner: the proprietors are to bind their hats with a small silk lace, tagged at the ends with silver, and surmounted with a tuft of grass from the *wether*; they are to ride in procession to the high cross in Leicester, and thence to proceed to St. Mary's Church, which is to be decorated with flowers; a

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sermon is there to be preached for the benefit of a hospital founded by the good duke Henry, father of the princess Blanche; and, when the service is over, the clergyman shall recite the deed conveying this gift of land, the company shall return to their inn to dinner, and the day shall close with mirth and festivityⁿ.”

It is not easy to conceive a picture more interesting than this, to a mind not so much lost in false refinement as to despise the genuine and natural emotions of the human heart. It was gaiety and honest good-humour that first in this instance called forth the liberality of John of Gaunt. The titular king felt that he was a man, and the cheerly and pleasant sentiments of his nature boiled over at the view of human happiness. He felt a prouder, or a more inbred, tranquillity at the sight of living beings with whom he could fraternise, than at feeling himself lord

ⁿ Throsby, Supplementary Volume to Views in Leicestershire: art. Ratby.

Of shadowy forests, with gay champaigns CHAP.
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rich'd,

With plenteous rivers, and wide-skirted 1382.

meads°.

It is pleasant to contemplate this ancient baron neighboured to a throne, in his accidental acts of beneficence as he rode forth from his venerable battlements, at one time adding to and entailing upon future times the festivity of a circle of honest rustics, and at another saving an ill-fated heretic from the flames lighted up for his destruction by the votaries of superstition.

It becomes, however, the sobriety of historical disquisition to distinguish here, and, while we are pleased with the human feelings of John of Gaunt, to acknowledge that he might have been more equitable and more virtuous. He was adding to the pleasurable feelings of the more robust and independent members of the community; but he was not acting the part of a man who bore in mind

° Shakespear: Lear, Act I.

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the shackled powers of intellect and usefulness he was enabled to enlarge, who benevolently recollected the scenes of private and unobtrusive woe it was in his power to relieve, who thought of the widow, the orphan and the prisoner, the sons of indulgence and ease whom ill fortune had cast forth to want, and the maimed and the cripple incapacitated to earn the means of subsistence. His jest of a *calf's-head*, a *wether*, and an *ewe*, was not in the most exquisite style of fancy; and there was more good-humour and convivial spirit, than principle and a digested and systematical philanthropy, in the act we have recited.

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POEMS TENDING TO PROMOTE THE CAUSE OF
ECCLESIASTICAL REFORMATION.—VISIONS OF
PIERCE PLOWMAN.

THE advocates of the doctrines of Wicliffe, and the Protestants of the sixteenth century, were anxious to press the venerable name of Chaucer into their cause. It appeared no very strained hypothesis to state the poet as a Lollard. He and Wicliffe were protected by the same patron; and he had in early life translated the *Roman de la Rose*, a poem satirising the pretensions of the mendicant orders in a style very similar to that of the patriarch reformer. But our ancestors, not satisfied with such tokens of apparent coincidence between these eminent geniuses, thought proper to give to the public as

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Suppositi-
tious writ-
ings of
Chaucer
in favour
of the
doctrines
of Wic-
liffe.

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Chaucer's certain compositions in prose and verse written to promote the direct purposes of ecclesiastical reformation on the model of Wicliffe. This was easily done. Anonymous pieces of literature belonging to this remote period, particularly of the poetical class, readers were apt, even when they had no particular purpose to serve, to ascribe gratuitously to an author so celebrated, and so much in their recollection, as Chaucer. Of this sort are the majority of the pieces which Stow in his edition has added to the works of our author. It is in this way that a prose declamation against the abuses of the church, entitled Jack Upland^a, has been attributed to Chaucer. In the same manner an additional article became foisted into the Canterbury Tales, called the Plowmans Tale^b. Even a further composition in a similar spirit was assigned to Chaucer, entitled the Pilgrimes Tale.

Jack Up-
land.The Plow-
mans Tale.The Pil-
grimes
Tale.

^a First printed by Speght in the edition of 1602. See Tyrwhit, Introd. to Glossary.

^b First printed in the edition of 1542.

Tale^c, which bears internal marks of having been written later than the year 1536^d. It is not probable that any one of these pieces was really composed by him. Both in language and sentiments they appear to belong to a later period. Chaucer, though an enemy to the artifices and insincerity of the friars, and perhaps personally the friend of Wicliffe, does not seem ever to have enlisted himself in the party of the Lollards. In the Testament of Love, he expresses his belief in the real presence; and, in the discourse of the Person [Parson], with which the Canterbury Tales are concluded, he declaims with great emphasis for the utility of auricular confession.

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The mention of the Plowmans Tale naturally leads to the consideration of a work of no small merit, certainly the production of the age of Chaucer, entitled the Visions of Pierce Plowman. It is probable that the Tale just mentioned, and another ancient

Visions of
Pierce
Plowman.

became the
origin of
other
poems
against
the esta-
blished
church,
under the

^c Speght, Additions to the Life of Chaucer: his books.

^d Tyrwhit, Preface, note e.

CHAP. poem, entitled Pierce the Plowmans Crede,
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name of
the Plow-
man.
are applaud-
ed by
Spenser.

derived their name from the popularity which attended upon these ancient allegories. Another honour of the highest class which the Visions of Pierce Plowman may boast, is the manner in which they are mentioned by Spenser in his Epilogue to the Shepherd's Calendar, where, addressing his book, he says,

Dare not to match thy pipe with Tityrus his
stile,

Nor with the Pilgrim that the Ploughman
plaid awhile;

Tityrus being certainly an appellation bestowed by Spenser upon Chaucer^e, and afterward from him adopted by Milton^f. There is an obvious propriety in this appellation, as having been chosen by Virgil, who appears, from the First Book of the House of Fame, to have been Chaucer's favourite classic.

^e Shepherd's Calendar, February, June, December; and Colin Clout is Come Home Again, init.

^f Mansus, ver. 34.

Mr. Tyrwhit indeed has thrown out an insinuation that, in the second line of the above couplet, Spenser does not refer to the Visions of Pierce Plowman, but to the Plowmans Tale falsely attributed to Chaucer; and gives this ingenious reason for his opinion, "that the author of the Visions in no instance speaks of himself as a Ploughman," and that, if Spenser was guilty of a flagrant injustice and absurdity in "putting the author of the Plowman's Tale on the same footing with Chaucer, this may be supposed to have been done in compliance with the taste of his age^s." But the whole of this remark is in the spirit of Mr. Tyrwhit, whose delight it is to strip ancient anecdote and record of every thing which can render them interesting to the imagination. Spenser, who was no antiquarian, needs not be imagined more accurate than Warton, who was an antiquarian, and who naturally construes the line above quoted as referring to the more eminent poet^h. Not to mention that, if we regard the word

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^s Introd. to Cant. Tales, note 32.

^h Observations on Spenser, Sect. IV.

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“Ploughman” in the quotation as the name of a poem, and interpret “plaid” in the sense of “piped” or “sung,” there will be no inaccuracy imputable to the passage. The writer of the Visions is a “Pilgrim;” for it is among his wanderings in the Malvern Hills in Worcestershire, that, overcome with fatigue, he falls asleep, and sees the scenes and personages he has described to his reader. If Spenser had “complied with the taste of his age,” he would have spoken of the author of the Plowmans Tale not as the competitor of Chaucer, but as being Chaucer himself. But, in reality, the suffrage of a poet to the merits of a brother poet is one of those things which in literature should be regarded as most sacred, and which has perhaps scarcely been profaned but in the case of friendship or clientship to a living bard.

Period at
which
they were
written.

The date of the Visions of Pierce Plowman seems capable of being satisfactorily ascertained. The author speaks of the siege of Calais as a recent event¹, and represents

Mede [or Venality], one of his allegorical personages, as declaring that, if her advice had been listened to, the conquest of France would have been completed ^k. Conscience in return reproaches Mede with having caused the death of the king's father ^k, a remark obviously applicable to the catastrophe of Edward II. In another part of the poem, Reason is introduced taking her seat between the king and his son ^l: the Black Prince therefore was now popular. The siege of Calais belongs to the year 1347; the battle of Poitiers happened in 1356: the siege of Calais would not have been mentioned as the last memorable public event, if the battle of Poitiers had already occurred. The above declaration of Mede also implies that the prosecution of the war was now suspended; and it was suspended for eight years by a truce, previously to the battle of Poitiers. It is therefore reasonable to believe that the poem of *Pierce Plowman* was produced in this

him and
position
of the
author

^k Passus III.

^l Passus IV.

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interval. We may further with sufficient probability regard the following lines as tending to fix the period in which the work was written.

In date of our ^m dryght, in a drye Apriell,
A thousande and thre hundred, twyse twenty
and ten,
My wafers ⁿ ther wer ^o geisen, whan Chicester
was mair^p.

An allusion which occurs to "the pestilence-time ^q" as recent [the great plague of London occurred in 1349] may also serve to confirm this interpretation.

Name and
profession
of their
author.

The author of the Visions of Pierce Plow-

^m lord. Sax. ⁿ *fortè*, thei.

^o scarce, uncommon. *Geason*, Spenser. In other words, it was a year of dearth.

^p Passus XIII. According to Stow (Survey of London: temporal government), John of Chichester was mayor of London in 1359 and 1369. Stow, in his Annals, who, as well as Wood, calls the author of the poem John Malverne, ascribes the Visions of Pierce Plowman to the year 1342.

^q Passus X.

man is said to have been Robert Langland^r, a priest^s (Wood says a monk^t), born at Mortimer's^s Cleobury in the county of Salop^h, and fellow of Oriel College in Oxford^u. It has since been observed that the only indication of the author's name occurring in the poem is that he is repeatedly spoken of by the prænomen of William. This remark however ought not to be considered as sufficient to overthrow the evidence of Crowley, the ancient editor: nothing is more common than a confusion of Christian names in speaking of remote and undistinguished persons; and Crowley perhaps, recollecting imperfectly the information he had received, felt an unconscious preference to the Christian name he himself bore^w. Let us not, without ade-

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^r Preface to Robert Crowley's edition, 1550.

^s Bale, Cent. VI, Chap. xxxvii.

^t Wood, Antiq. Oxon. Lib. II, Collegium Oriense: scriptores.

^u Wood, ubi supra. Stow, A. D. 1342.

^w In the printed editions there is a hemistich, "Sonne, slepest thou?" which, in the Harleian (No. 2376) and Cotton (Vespasian, B. 16) manuscripts, stands "Will [or Wiliam],

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Plan of the
work.

quate reason, deprive ourselves of the pleasure of believing that we possess some individual knowledge, respecting the persons who awaken our partiality and are entitled to our gratitude^x.

The Visions of Pierce Plowman are divided in the printed editions into twenty Passus or Cantos: in two old and perfect manuscripts^y in the British Museum, the divisions amount to twenty-three. In number of verses however, calculating from the pages

slepest thou?" If this is an intentional variation in the editions, and not arising from a difference of copies, the change of the Christian name cannot be accounted for from the motive assigned in the text.

^x Crowley does not express himself like a person speaking at hazard respecting the author of the poem. "Being desyerous," says he, "to knowe the name of the autoure of this most worthy worke (gentle reader) and the tyme of the writynge of the same: I did not onely gather together suche aunciente coppies as I could come by, but also consult such men as I knew to be more exercised in the studie of antiquities, then I myselfe have ben. And by some of them I have learned that the autour was named Roberte langelande, a Shropshire man, borne in Cleybirie, about viii miles from Malverne hilles."

^y Ms. Cotton. Vespasian. B. 16. The divisions are the same in Ms. Harleian. No. 2376.

and the number of lines in a page, the printed copies do not greatly differ from the manuscript. The plan of the poem is extremely miscellaneous; several of the cantos having very little connection with each other. The object may be defined to be a satire upon the vices of almost every profession, but particularly upon the corruptions of the clergy, and the absurdities of superstition². The personages of the poem are Mede, Conscience, Simony, Theology, Covetise, Hunger, Sloth, Wit, Study, &c. Separately from the question of poetical merit exhibited in the work, it will be seen from the plan, that it possesses a high value, as comprising a picture of the manners of the fourteenth century through almost every class into which society was divided.

After a variety of unconnected scenes, the author at length meets with Thought, by whom he is introduced to Wit; and this latter directs him to the habitation of Do-well,

² Warton, Vol. I, Sect. viii.

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Do-better and Do-best, three persons concerning whom he was making very anxious enquiry. Their dwelling, when explained, appears to be in a castle, made by Kind [or Nature], and composed of the four elements. This castle is the human body. Kind has closed craftily within it a paramour whom he loves, called *Anima*. Sir Do-well is the guardian of the castle; and Do-better, his daughter, the lady's principal attendant: Do-best is over both, and whatever he bids must be done. The constable of the castle and keeper of the watch, is sir Inwit, assisted by five fair sons, sir See-well, and Say-well, and Hear-well, with sir Work-well, a ^a wighty man of strength, and sir Godfrey Go-well. In this place, the poem is divided in the Cotton and Harleian manuscripts, with the notice, *Explicit Visio Will̃i de Petro Plouhman*, and, immediately after, *Hic incipit Visio ejusdem Will̃i de Dowel* [Do-well]. The poem is divided in these copies into the vision of

Piers Plouhman in ten Passus, the Vision of CHAP.
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 Dowel in seven Passus, of Dobet in four
 Passus, and of Dobest in two Passus, making
 in all twenty-three. Toward the end of the
 performance, Antichrist is introduced, whose
 banner is borne by Pride, and who is wel-
 comed into a monastery with the ringing
 of bells, and a solemn congratulatory pro-
 cession of all the monks marching out to
 receive him. This personage at length lays
 siege to the strong-hold of Conscience, assisted
 by seven giants, who are the Seven Deadly
 Sins; and the assault is led by Sloth, who
 has under him a battalion of more than a
 thousand priests.

The delineation of the person of Covetise
 may serve as a specimen of the author's
 talent for descriptive poetry.

Specimens.
 Covetous-
 ness de-
 scribed.

And then came Covetis, can I him not dis-
 crive,

So hungerly and hollowe, so sternely he lok'd :
 He was ^b bittle-brow'd and ^c baberlypp'd also,

^b beetle-browed, having projecting brows.

^c drivel-lipped, from *baver*, Fr.

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With two blered eyén, as a blinde hagge;
 And as a lethren purse lolled his chekes,
^d Well syder than his chyn, they shever'd for
 colde;
 And, as ^ea bound man of his bacon, his berd
 was ^fbidrauled:
 With a ^ghode on his heade, and a lousy hatte
 above;
 And in a tawny ^hteberd, of twelve winter age,
 Al to torné, and ⁱbaudye, and full of lyce
 crepinge,—
^k But if that a louse could have lepen the
 better,
 She had not walkt on the ⁱwelte, so was it
 thred bare.

Passus V.

Speech of
Envy.

The speech of Envy, who comes to be
 shrived by a confessor, is scarcely inferior in
 spirit and discrimination to any specimen of
 poetry in the English language.

^d Hanging lower. Percy, Vol. II, Glossary.^e a serving-man, a predial slave, eating fat bacon.^f bedriveled. ^g hood. ^h cloak. ⁱ dirty. Tyrwhit.^k But seems here used in the sense of *Add, And*. See Divisions of Purley.ⁱ selvage.

I wold be shriv'n, quod this shrew, if I
for shame durst.—

I have a neyghbour nye me, I have ^mnoyed
hym ofte,

And made his frend his foe ⁿthrough my false
tong ;

His grace and his good happes grev'th me
full sore.

Betwene many and many I make debate oft,
That both lyfe and ^olyme is lost ⁿthrough
my spech.

And, when I mete him in market that I most
hate,

I ^phalsé him hendlech as I his frend were ;

For he is doughtier then I, I dare do none
other,—

And had I mastery and might, God wot my
wyll !

And, whan I come to the ^akirke, and shuld
knele to the ^rrode,

And pray for the people, as the priest teach-
eth,

^m annoyed.

ⁿ thoru, Mss. This word in Pierce Plowman is perhaps always
a dissyllable,

^o limb.

^p embrace him courteously.

^a church.

^r rood, cross, crucifix.

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For pilgrimes, and for palmers, and for al the
people after,

Than I cry on my knees, Thou, Christ, geve
him sorow,

That bare away my ^abole, and my ^tbroké
shete!

Away from the aulter then turne I mine eyen,
And beholdé how Elen hath a new coate;
I wysh that ^twere mine, with al the webbe
after.

And at mens ^ulesing I laughé, ^xthat mine
herte aketh;

And for their winning I wepe and ^ywelé the
tyme:

For whoso hath more than I, that angreth me
sore.

And thus I lyve ^zloveles, like a ^alythier
dogge,

That al my body ^bbolneth for bytter of my
gall:

I ^cmight not eaten many yeres as a man
ought:

^a bowl.

^t torn sheet.

^u losing.

^x till.

^y wail.

^z unloving.

^a vicious, curst.

^b swells.

^c have not.

^d May no suger ne no sweté thing swagé the swelling, CHAP.
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Ne no ^ediapenidion drive it from my herte,
Nether shrift, nether shame, but ^fshraping
of mi maw.

Passus V.

There is much humour in the passage in which Mede is described performing her shrift; and Chaucer has been supposed to have had this passage in his eye in his Sompnours Tale^g, though he has heightened the satire with many additional circumstances of comic and picturesque imagination.

Langland
imitated
by Chau-
cer.

Than came ther a confessor, cop'd as a
frier;

To Medé the mayd he ^h mellud thes wordes,
And saÿd full softly, in ⁱ shrift as it were:
Though ^k lewd men and lern'd men had lien
by ^l the bothe,

^d No sugar, nor &c, can. ^e cathartic.

^f this word seems to mean *cramming*. It is not to be found in the glossaries.

^g Warton, Vol. I, Sect. VIII.

^h *forté* honied, uttered in a wheedling, affected voice.

ⁱ i. e. secretly. ^k ignorant, unlearned. ^l thee.

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And Falsenes had yfoul'd the this fifty wynter,
I shall ^m assoyle the my selfe for a ⁿ seme of
whete,

And ^o als be thy ^p bedman, and beare wel thy
message

Amongest knightés and clerkés conscience
to turne.

Then Mede for her misdeeds to that manné
kneled,

And shrove her of her ^q shroudnes, shameles
I trow,

Told him a tale, and toke him a ^r noble

For to be her ^p bedman, and her ^s broker also.

Than he ^m assoyl'd her ^t sone, and ^u sithen
he sayde :

We have a window in working, wil ^x set us
ful high ;

Woldest thou glase the gable, and grave
therin thi name,

^y Seker shoulde thy soule be heaven to have.

^m absolve. ⁿ seam, a measure containing eight bushels.

^o also.

^p beadsman, a man employed in praying for another.

^q shrewdness. ^r six shillings and eight pence.

^s bawd. ^t soon. ^u afterward.

^x make us famous. ^y Secure, certain.

^a Wyst I that, quod the woman, I would
not spare

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For to be your frende, fryer, and faylé you
never;

I shal cover your kyrke, your cloisture ^a do
maken,

Wallés do whyten, and wyndowes do glasen,
Do paynten and portraye, and pay for the
makyng,

That every ^b segge shal say, I am sister of
your house.

Passus III.

The following passage has deservedly been ^{by Milton.}
pointed out by preceding commentators, not
only as possessing uncommon energy and
sublimity, but as having probably furnished
Milton with the first hint of his description
of a lazar-house.

^c Kynd Conscience tho heard, and came out
of the planetts,

^a Knew. ^a cause to be made. ^b bench, *siège*, Fr.

^c i. e. Nature then heard the prayer of Conscience. The
planets were conceived to be the sources of disease.

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And sent forth his ^d forriours. Fevers and
fluxes,
Coghés and ^e cardiacles, crampés and toth
aches,
Reumes and ^f radgondes and ^g raÿnous scalles,
Bylés and botches and burnynge agues,
Freneses and foule evill, foragers of Kinde,
Hadden ^h pricked and praiéd polles of the
people,
That largely a legion losten their lives sone.
There was “ⁱ Harow! and helpe! here com-
meth Kinde,
With Death that is dreadful, to undone us
all!”
The lord that lyv’th ^k after lust tho aloude
cried
After Confort, a knight, to come and bear
his banner.

^d forrayers, foragers.

^e heart-aches.

^f *Rhadegiæ*, piles. See the old English books of medicine.

^g *roynyssche*, Cotton Ms, from *roigneur*, *rogneur*, Fr. eating,
gnawing: *scalles*, leprosy.

^h selected, marked out for destruction, as *to prick for
sheriffs*: *praiéd*, preyed upon: *polles*, catalogues, a muster-roll.

ⁱ Haro, Fr. help!

^k luxuriously.

Alarme! alarme! quod that lord, ¹ ech lyfe CHAP.
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kepe his own!

And than met these men: theyr minstrels
^m myght pype,

And theyr heraudes of armes ⁿ had descrived
lordes.

Agé the ^o hoore he was in the ^p vaw-ward
And bare the banner before Death; by right
he it claim'd:

Kyndé came after, with many kene sores,
As pockés and pestilences, and much people
^a shent,

So Kind through corruptions killed ful many:
Death came drivynge after, and all to dust
^r pashed

Kyngés and ^s Kayzers, knightés and popes.
Passus XX.

The passage alluded to in Milton is this:

¹ each keep (preserve) his own life! ^m did.

ⁿ descried the leaders of the enemy's force. ^o hoary.

^p van. ^a ruined, hurt.

^r dashed, with the paw, or hoof.

^s Cæsars. In the Harleian Ms. this line stands

King|és and knightes,| kaysayser|es and popes;

nearer to the anapestic measure than the verse in the text.

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Immediately a place
Before his eyes appear'd, sad, noisom, dark ;
A lazar-house it seem'd, wherein were laid
Numbers of all diseas'd ; all maladies
Of gastly spasm, or racking torture ; qualms
Of heart-sick agony ; all feaverous kinds ;
Convulsions, epilepsies, fierce catarrhs ;
Intestine stone and ulcer ; cholic pangs ;
Demoniac phrenzy, moping melancholy,
And moon-struck madness ; pining atrophy,
Marasmus, and wide-wasting pestilence ;
Dropsies, and asthmas, and joint-racking
rheums.

Dire was the tossing ! deep the groans !

Despair

Tended the sick busiest from couch to couch ;
And over them triumphant Death his dart
Shook ; but delay'd to strike.

PARADISE LOST, BOOK XI, ver. 477.

Versifica-
tion of
the poem.

The versification of the Visions of Pierce Plowman is considerably different from any which has been used for some centuries in the English language. It has been decided by the critics, that “ the verses of this author are not distinguished from prose, either by a determinate number of syllables, or by rhyme,

or indeed by any other apparent test, except the studied recurrence of the same letter three times in each line ; a contrivance which we should not suspect of producing much harmony, but to which (as Crowley, the original editor of the poem, justly observes) even a modern ear will gradually become accustomed :

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Its alliteration.

This appears to me a mistake of exactly the same nature as Dryden has committed, when, speaking of Chaucer's versification, he has ridiculed the opinion of "him who published the last edition," that, ' altho in divers places Chaucer's verses may seem to us to stand of unequal measures, yet a skilful reader, that can scan them in their nature, shall find it otherwise.' Dryden represents this as a decision "not worth confuting ; an error of so gross and obvious a nature, as, in every thing but matters of faith and revelation, common sense will teach us to reject *."

* Ellis, Specimen of the Early English Poets, Vol. I, Chap. VI. See also Tyrwhit, Essay, note 57 ; and Percy, Reliques, Vol. II, Book III, Introduction.

u Edition, 1687, Preface.

* Preface to Fables.

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The judgment of that editor is however now established beyond confutation; nor would it perhaps be less easy to vindicate the versification of Langland, than Mr. Tyrwhit and others have found it to establish the harmony of Chaucer's poems.

Its anapestic measure.

It has very truly been said that the scheme of versification in *Pierce Plowman*, when regular and complete, is required to contain three words beginning with the same letter: it might, I believe, have been added that two of these words are in that case always to be found in the first hemistich, and one in the last. It would have been surprising however, as the critics have justly remarked, if verses, having no other principle of structure than this alliteration, should "produce much harmony." But it will probably be found on examination, that the verses of Langland are properly anapestic, or consisting of four feet of three syllables each, the last syllable of each foot receiving the emphasis; with scarcely more deviation from the regularity of this scheme than is to be found in the most approved modern writers by whom it

is employed. Sometimes a foot, particularly CHAP.
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the first, consists of one short syllable and one long, and is an iambic ; sometimes it consists of three short syllables and one long ; and sometimes, the beat, or emphasis, falling upon the first syllable of the verse, this single syllable represents a foot : but to irregularities of this nature English poetry, in almost every age, has been accustomed. There are also verses which it seems impossible to reduce to any scheme of harmony ; but that by no means proves any thing against the rythmical measure and scansion of the rest. The difficulty of forming our pronunciation so as constantly to produce the intended harmony, will not be greater in Langland than in Chaucer ; and the recollection of their respective laws of versification will often assist us, in the one and the other, to correct the perversions of transcribers. It has truly been observed^y, in opposition to Warton, that the alliteration of Langland is no more

^y Ellis, ubi supra.

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===== a restraint upon the poet's fancy than rhyme ;
or indeed than perhaps any other well concocted scheme of versification : and it will probably be seen in the last result, that the verses of Pierce Plowman's Visions are little less skilfully modelled to a certain law of harmony than the verses of the Canterbury Tales.

Its popularity with the Lollards and Protestants.

Langland, if the chronology we have assigned to his writings be just, may be regarded as the precursor of Wicliffe. His censures of the abuses of the Romish hierarchy exceed in boldness those of all preceding declaimers. He has even delivered what may be called prophecies of the history of the reformation, which have excited the greatest astonishment in the minds of modern readers. He was however on the whole probably a sound Catholic, and would have felt great indignation and horror at the peremptory proceedings of Wicliffe and his followers. Meanwhile the fate of his poetry became united with the fate of the Lollards. With them his work was a favourite companion and relaxation. His genius was their boast ; his

satire their consolation : they felt secure that they could not be worthy objects of contempt, while sallies so pregnant with imagination, with energy, with all that the English language could boast of most excellent, were in agreement with them. On the other hand, the Catholics regarded Langland with horror ; if the author had lived to a later period, they would probably, in spite of the eminence of his attainments, have, without compunction, consigned him to the flames. The Lutherans and Calvinists of a later age revived the expiring reputation of Pierce Plowman, and perused his lucubrations with transport ; they were proud to find sentiments with which they were reproached as modern, clothed in so ancient, so venerable, and so splendid a form. The lovers of poetry, and the martyrs of patriotism and religion, were alike loud in their applauses of the Plowman ; and the taste of the age taught men that they could not offer a more honourable oblation to the merits of Chaucer, than by representing him, with or without the strictness of evidence, as the fellow-labourer of Langland.

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Compari-
son of
Langland
and Chau-
cer.

Their pri-
mary
equality.

It has been already shown that the Visions of Pierce Plowman were written during the eight years truce from 1347 to 1355. Chaucer was already a poet. He had written his Court of Love, and was probably at this time employed in writing his Troilus and Creseide. Langland therefore stands on much higher ground in point of antiquity than Gower, who is not known to have written English verse earlier than the sixteenth year of Richard II. At the period when Langland's poem was yet new to the ears of his countrymen, he might place himself proudly upon an equality with his more famous and fortunate contemporary. His versification, when best illustrated and understood, will probably be found not altogether so sweet and mellifluous as that of Chaucer; though perhaps no reason can be assigned, independently of the habit to which our ears are formed, why the alliterative initials employed by Langland should not be as respectable a concomitant of poetical conceptions, as that chiming of similar terminations which is known among us by the name of rhyme.

Chaucer's thoughts are more refined than those of Langland; he was a closer observer of human nature, especially in what relates to the softer passions, and the more subtle and evanescent workings of the soul. But Chaucer, particularly in the *Troilus and Creseide*, which, in point of chronology, is the piece which stands in competition with the *Visions*, is a translator only; nor perhaps can any passages be produced from the works of our favoured bard, of more energy and sublimity, than the speech of Envy, and the vengeance of Kynd, above quoted from *Pierce Plowman*. In a word, a poet who has looked with so penetrating an eye through all the complexities of human society as Langland has done, whose imagery is often so rich and so felicitous, who is capable so powerfully to command the passions of sympathy and of horror, and who can boast so admirable a vein of humour, can never be under the necessity of employing symbols of submission, and blushing for the conscious inferiority of his powers, in any circle to be

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found within the many-tongued regions of
the poet's Elysium.

There is one singularity worthy of observation in the history of these two writers. They were neither of them, so far as we can judge from the most exact adjustments of chronology, indebted to the other for the commencements and hints of genius. They sat, each in his sequestered nook, unconscious of each other's existence, wrapt in thoughts of inspiration, and favoured alternately and impartially with the visitations of the Muse. They were the growth of a country widely manured with literature, impregnated with the seeds of genius, and bursting at once in different parts of its surface into poetic life.

Subsequent
superiority
of Chau-
cer.

Langland
probably
short-
lived.

In the sequel, however, Chaucer rose far above Langland. Of Langland, after the production of *Pierce Plowman's Visions*, we hear no more. His life perhaps, like that of William de Lorris, was of short duration, and during that little period was shut up in an inglorious and unknown retreat. Chaucer

was blessed with a long life, and with faculties that continued in their full vigour to the last ; he was called forth to be the ornament of courts ; he visited different climates ; he was enabled to partake of all the choicest sources of mental improvement. It was thus that he was gradually educated and ripened to the power of producing the Canterbury Tales. CHAP.
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The Visions of Pierce Plowman are in a continued strain of allegory, congenial to the age in which they were written, but tedious and repulsive to a period of greater taste and refinement. For a short time we are delighted with the creative power of the poet who calls up these unsubstantial forms, who dresses them in appropriate attributes, who makes them speak with energy, vivacity and character, and gives them "a local habitation and a name." But they should only show themselves, and disappear ; they are adapted to the pageant of a procession, but they cannot be made agents with success. They are essentially abstractions, and cannot represent individuality. They have no power over our

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passions, excite no interest, and awake neither hope nor fear, love nor hatred, sorrow nor joy. We can commune for a while with such personages as Hunger, and Envy, and Covetousness, and Sloth; but, if it is attempted to occupy us about them through a copious volume, we are disgusted; and the poetry which restricts itself within this sphere, instead of producing in us that hilarity, and elevation, and consciousness of a pure and spiritual nature, which it is the best office of poetry to generate, rivels up the integuments of the soul, and leaves a painful sense of vacuity, and internal sinking, and self-degradation. The Canterbury Tales are the reverse of this. They deal in realities; they exhibit the sound and variegated features of man; they act upon all our sympathies in turn, relieve us with pleasantry, melt us with sorrow, and work up our souls into tumults of resentment or exultation.

Langland
and Chau-
cer not
acquainted
with each
other.

It is probable that Chaucer and Langland were unacquainted with each other. Much is it to be regretted that, in an age when poetry was young, two men so uncommonly

gifted should not have been brought into contact. They would have been friends in as eminent a degree, as Chaucer and Gower were. Langland, it may be, perished unknown and uncoun-
 tenanced, discouraged and depressed by the neglect he was fated to endure. Chaucer would have brought him from his retreat, have introduced him to the palaces of the great, and have plentifully supplied him with the means of improvement, and with the honourable support and honest pleasure which result to a man of ardent and aspiring spirit when the faces of his fellow beings are turned upon him with a confession of his worth. But England was not permitted to be blest with the effusions of Langland's riper and more cultivated mind.

The versification of *Pierce the Plowmans Crede* is nearly the same with that of the poem of Langland, but more uncultivated and wild in its structure. The *Plowmans Tale*, which has been so absurdly ascribed to Chaucer, is very different in the mechanism of its verse, though it affects to maintain a

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Versifica-
 tion of
 the
 Plow-
 mans
 Crede.
 of the Plow-
 mans
 Tale.

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certain degree of resemblance by means of alliterative initials. It is written in stanzas of eight lines each, ending in a sort of burthen; and the verse is octosyllabic, in the same manner as the Romaunt of the Rose, and the Book of the Duchess, except that the rhymes are alternate.—It may be observed that even Spenser, where he means, in the passage formerly quoted, to commemorate the poem of Langland, has thought proper to introduce the triple alliteration in compliment to the ancient writer, though the verse in which it is placed is not anapestic, but iambic.

Not written
by the
same
author.

Warton is inclined to believe that Pierce the Plowmans Crede and the Plowmans Tale were written by the same person². Speght is of opinion that the writer of the Plowmans Tale is also the author of Jack Upland³, which he considers as being of the nature of a creed. Both these judgments are founded upon this couplet in the Plowmans Tale.

² Vol. I, Sect. IX.

³ Proem to Jack Upland in Speght's edition.

And of frerés I have before

Told in a makin of a crede.

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ver. 3005, Urry's Edition.

The inference which they draw is however by no means a close one. The couplet indeed probably refers to Pierce the Plowmans Crede: but all that it implies is, that, as the appellation of the Plowman descended from generation to generation among the poets who satirised the corruptions of the Roman Catholic church, so the Plowman whose declamation pretended to be a sequel to the Canterbury Tales, might, poetically speaking, be considered as one with the Plowman who in his Crede inveighs against the friars, though the writers of the two performances might, in strict chronology, have existed at an interval of centuries.

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COMMOTIONS IN FRANCE.—SCHISM OF THE CHURCH.
—PROPOSED EXPEDITION INTO SPAIN.—CRUSADE
OF SPENCER, BISHOP OF NORWICH.—TRUCE.

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1381.

Minority of
Charles
VI.

THE commencement of the reign of Charles VI. king of France was attended with many unprosperous circumstances. The government fell into the hands of his uncles ; and these princes, guided by sentiments less honourable and pure than those of John of Gaunt, used the power devolved upon them only for their private purposes. Charles V. had imposed heavy taxes upon the people ; but he was a severe economist, and left behind him considerable treasures. His brothers, not contented with dissipating these treasures, revived, and even increased, after a short interval of specious remission, the

burthens of the late reign. The common people had submitted to the hardships inflicted upon them by a sober and economical monarch, but felt much less patient under the oppressions of a selfish and prodigal regency. They broke out into excesses similar to those in England, which have already been described, but of longer duration. They murdered the collectors of the imposts, and broke open the prisons. These circumstances occurred at Paris; at Rouen they elected a person whom they styled their king, the first act of whose reign was the publication of an edict for the perpetual abolition of taxes^a. The insurgents of this period are distinguished in the French historians by the appellation of *maillotins*, taken, as it is said, from the mallet, or hammer of iron or steel, which they used to break the armour of their adversaries. It may also be suspected that a sort of pun was intended in this appel-

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Insurrec-
tions
among his
subjects.

^a Froissart, Chap. lxxxiv, lxxxviii, xcv. Villaret, Histoire de France, ad ann.

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lation, which, interpreted according to the rules of grammatical analogy, would more naturally signify *babes in their swaddling clothes*.

1382.

Warlike
projects of
the Eng-
lish go-
vernment.

This situation of affairs in the rival kingdom inspired the statesmen of England with the thought of taking advantage of the anarchy of France, for the purpose of obliging the government of that country to conclude a peace on terms less severe than they had lately demanded. Richard II, who was totally destitute of the patience, vigour and self-denial requisite for military glory, but who from a distance regarded it with eagerness, was not displeased at the suggestion. In May he announced to his parliament the plan of a voyage-royal to France^b. In December there is a writ in Rymer^c, directed to the king's admiral, requiring him to arrest all ships of a certain burthen, to be aiding and useful in the king's proposed passage.

Schism of
the church.

A further circumstance came in aid of the

^b Cotton, 5 Ric. 2.

^c 6 Ric. 2, Dec. 12.

military projects of the present period. There were at this time, as we have seen, two pretenders to the papal throne: Urban VI, an Italian, residing at Rome; and Robert, calling himself Clement VII, a Frenchman, residing at Avignon. To the former of these adhered England, Italy and the Empire; and to the latter France, with its allies, Scotland, Castille and Flanders. Urban, first elected, and in tranquil possession of the ancient seat of ecclesiastical empire, was impatient of the insolence of his rival, and issued letters of a crusade exciting his adherents to the sub-
 jecting by force of arms such states as professed themselves obstinately rebellious to the legitimate possessor of the papal authority. Letters of this sort were directed in England, to John of Gaunt who claimed the throne of Castille, and to Spencer bishop of Norwich who had displayed great vigour in suppressing the late insurrection, and whom pope Urban endeavoured to instigate to an invasion of the territories of the count of Flanders^d.

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Pope Urban issues letters of crusade.

^d Cotton, 6 Ric. 2.

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John of
Gaunt pro-
poses an
expedition
into Spain.

Proposal of
bishop
Spencer.

Policy of
the war.

John of Gaunt submitted to the English parliament in November 1381 a proposal for transporting two thousand men at arms and two thousand archers upon an expedition into Spain ; provided the parliament would enable him to raise a loan of £. 60,000 [in modern money upward of one million sterling], which he proposed to engage himself, by sufficient sureties, faithfully to repay^e. His brother, the earl of Cambridge, had sailed for Spain in the beginning of that year. This proposal was by the king's direction again laid before parliament in the autumn of the present year, together with an offer by the bishop of Norwich for a similar crusade in Flanders^f. The proposal of John of Gaunt was declined by parliament ; and that of the military prelate, though not till the spring of 1383, received the sanction of this assembly.

The war between England and France had now been for two years in a state of tacit suspension ; and it might well be doubted, by a sober calculator of moral and political evils,

* Cotton, 5 Ric. 2. ^f Ditto, 6 Ric. 2.

how far it was advisable to rouse it from its repose. The temptations however, to a common eye, of the anarchy prevailing in the latter country, and of the religious motives growing out of the schism which might be employed to awaken men to arms, were too great to be resisted. If the present opportunity were not embraced, France would prepare herself for aggression at a time when we should no longer have these advantages within our reach. It is thus that the voluntary introduction of that mass of calamity and vice expressed by the term war, has ever been a subject of fantastic computations to the cold-blooded and specious mortals known by the name of statesmen.

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In either of the quarters pointed out for crusade, France appeared to be particularly exposed to injury. Henry of Transtamare, especially from the period at which John of Gaunt had avowed pretensions to the Castilian throne, had ever been one of her most zealous and active allies. On the other hand, the proud Castillians had never been entirely reconciled to the succession of a bastard race,

State of
Spain.

Motives for
invasion.

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and the English prince was not without his partisans. If Spain could, by a change of her sovereign, be converted from an ally of France to an ally of England, this would, according to the reasonings of politicians, give an entirely new face to the questions at issue between the rival powers; though perhaps even this advantage would be rendered useless under such a government as that of Richard II. seemed likely to be.

Sentiments
of John of
Gaunt.

John of Gaunt no doubt believed that it would be highly honourable to his country, if a branch of the house of Plantagenet could be seated upon the throne of Castille. But, if he thought of his country, it may be believed that he did not entirely forget himself. To reign among a people distinguished by the name of the Old Christians, and whose annals had been adorned, more than those of any other European monarchy, with feats of chivalry and heroism, was a favourite object of his wishes. During the latter years indeed of his father's reign, when the whole power of the English government had been confided to him, the desires he felt respecting Spain

were sober and moderate. But, from the period of the accession of his nephew, his situation had been essentially changed, and was continually growing worse. He was almost too great for a subject, particularly in a country so unsettled as England, and where the persons holding the powers of administration entertained a rooted antipathy against him. In regard to personal safety, his residence here was scarcely eligible. And, if we consider his feelings, we shall not wonder that, foreseeing the calamities which impended over his nephew; and conscious of his impotence, harassed as he was by slander, and pursued by unpopularity, to prevent them; he desired to banish himself from his native home, and not to remain an unprofitable spectator of the miseries of England.

Such were the motives, public and private, of the proposed expedition into Spain. The case of Flanders was equally singular, and an enterprise on that side was thought to promise greater advantage. Flanders was one of the first countries in Europe which had experienced the political effects of mercantile opu-

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in comel
allivonaState of
Flanders.

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James d'-
Arteville.

lence. In 1337 the people of that country had risen against their feudal sovereign, and had been among the first to encourage Edward III. in his enterprise upon the crown of France. Their rebellion was of a very different complexion from those which have been above described. Its first instigator, James d'Arteville, an opulent trader of the town of Ghent, and a man of extraordinary talents, had immediately taken the lead; and, without the advantages of birth, or the forms of election, had made himself the sovereign of his country. The count of Flanders was obliged to resort for safety to the court of France. The revenues of the principality were received by D'Arteville, and expended according to his discretion. Such adherents of the exiled count as were likely to disturb the tranquillity of the new establishment, were sent into banishment by the demagogue, half their income being sequestered for the use of the state, and the other half appropriated to the subsistence of their families. He is said, whenever he appeared in public, to have been accompanied by seventy

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or eighty attendants instructed in his pleasure, who were accustomed, at a certain sign from their master, instantly to dispatch any one whom he pointed out to their vengeance, though D'Arteville at the same moment perhaps would exhibit the appearance of commanding them to desist, and reproving their violence. Under his government Flanders prospered; and though, after a reign of eight years, he lost his life in a popular commotion, his memory was still cherished by his countrymen. During the whole of this period, he was the faithful ally of Edward III; and at his death the cities of Flanders were obliged to send a deputation to the English sovereign, to justify themselves from the imputation of being concerned in his murder^s.

Philip d'Arteville.

After the death of this extraordinary rebel, the count of Flanders was restored to his dignity; but, not profiting by the experience of the past, and oppressing the people by vexatious imposts, they once more rose in

^s Froissart, Vol. I, Chap xxx, cxvi.

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rebellion against him in the year 1379. After various hostilities carried on with a doubtful success, the Flemings were at length induced to recollect the prosperity which they had enjoyed under their plebeian sovereign, and cast their eyes upon Philip d'Arteville, his son^h. The young burgher remembered the tragical fate of his father, and expressed some repugnance to the situation they tendered him. It is said ultimately to have been forced upon him ; yet, when once engaged, he appears to have conducted himself with great spirit and prudence. He took the field against his sovereign, and gained such advantages, that the count was speedily compelled to escape in disguise, and a second time to seek refuge in Franceⁱ.

Charles VI.
marches
against the
Flemings.

The duke of Burgundy, third uncle to Charles VI, had married the only daughter of the Flemish sovereign, and was recognised by his father-in-law as heir to that

^h Philippa, queen of England, had been his godmother, and had given him her name. Froissart, Vol. II, Chap. lxxi.

ⁱ Froissart, Chap. xxxvii, et seq.

principality. He was therefore forward to engage in the cause of the exiled prince, and had sufficient influence with the counsellors of the young king to induce them to resolve upon an expedition to chastise the revolt^k. Philip d'Arteville foresaw the storm which impended over him, and applied on the part of his countrymen to the English court for assistance. The ministers of Richard II. gave some encouragement to his envoys, but treated the question upon which they were sent, with the indolence and procrastination which characterised all their measures^l. The king talked in the spring, as we have seen, of a voyage-royal to France, and made some preparations in December. The proposal of the bishop of Norwich was also, by the king's order, submitted to the parliament which met in the close of the year, and approved by the commons, but did not receive the ultimate sanction of the legislature on that occasion. In

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^k Froissart, Chap. civ.^l Ditto, Chap. cvi, cvii, cxxviii, cxxxi,

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Battle of
Rosebecq.
November
27.

the mean time an army of eighty thousand French was marched into Flanders with their young king at their head; and, after some fluctuations of success, a memorable battle was fought at Rosebecq, in which the invaders were completely victorious, and Philip d'Arteville was killed fighting bravely for his country^m.

Punishment
of the Pa-
risians.

The discontented commons of France took advantage of this occasion, when the king, with his principal courtiers and the flower of his troops, was absent on foreign service, and renewed their former excesses. When Charles VI. returned from his successful campaign, he entered Paris like a conqueror, took away the gates of the city, barricadoed the streets, compelled the inhabitants to deliver up their arms and their leaders, and for fourteen days after his arrival put to death several of the insurgents daily by military executionⁿ. Similar severities were employed at Rouen, Orleans, Troyes, and other principal towns of France.

^m Froissart, Chap. cxvi. ⁿ Ditto, Chap. cxx, cxxix, cxxx.

It was now that the English government first began seriously to think of affording aid to the Flemish insurgents. Ghent, the principal town, and the birth-place of the D'Artevelles, still shut its gates against the conqueror. Richard therefore, in the parliament which met in the commencement of the year, proposed to march in person to the relief of the besieged, and by the assistance of an English army to restore the affairs of the malcontents. The legislature objected to this project, and required that the king and his uncles should remain at home to resist the Scots, the truce with whom would expire in the present summer. They however recommended to Richard to accede to the proposal of the warlike bishop of Norwich °.

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A considerable degree of mystery hangs over this expedition. The whole of the proceedings came afterward to be canvassed in parliament^p; and from them it appears that Richard had first required that the prelate

Crusade of
Henry
Spencer.

• Cotton, 6 Ric. 2.

° Ditto, 7 Ric. 2.

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should name the commander of the troops he purposed to raise, before the king would accept his proposition. To this the bishop demurred, but promised that such a general should be engaged as neither the king nor the legislature could disapprove. In his defence he seems to insinuate that he had offered the commission to John of Gaunt, but that they had broken off upon terms. This however is contradicted by the express stipulation of parliament that neither the king nor his uncles should cross the seas on this occasion. At last it appeared that he could find no sufficient general; perhaps he never intended to find any; and therefore in conclusion headed his crusade in person. The adventurous prelate was intoxicated with his success against the undisciplined insurgents of his own country, and believed that he had now an opportunity to inscribe his name with the Godfreys and the Lusignans.

His suc-
cesses.

The French government was under no apprehension of hostilities on the part of England, and made no preparation to resist this crusade. The bishop therefore, indebted

to their want of foresight and to the good will of the inhabitants, took many towns of Flanders, in rapid succession, immediately after his landing^a. Every courier brought to England the intelligence of his progress; and for a short time he appears to have been as great a hero in the eyes of his countrymen, as at the outfit of the expedition he had been in his own.

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Richard, with that promptitude of feeling which corresponded to his early years, caught the flame of military adventure from the trophies of the consecrated warrior. On this occasion he dispatched a very extraordinary challenge to his rival sovereign of France^r. In the preamble he states, that he has recently called to mind the multiplied injuries, violations and losses which he and his predecessor had sustained from the obstinate resistance of the pretenders to that crown, together with the effusion of Christian blood, the despoiling of religious houses and churches, the deflow-

Richard
challenges
king of
France.

^a Froissart, Chap. cxxxii, &c. ^r Rymer, 7 Ric. 2, Sep. 8.

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ering of virgins, the violation of wives, the oppression of unarmed and innocent inhabitants, the peril of souls redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, and a thousand other evils which neither pen nor tongue could describe. To put an end to these complicated mischiefs, he proposes a duel between himself and his competitor, body to body (each being now in the seventeenth year of his age); or between the two monarchs assisted respectively by their three uncles; or, if both these offers are declined, he calls upon his rival of France to appoint a day, when they should meet with their whole forces, to decide by mortal battle the question at issue between them.

Renewal of
the Scot-
tish truce.

At the same time that this challenge was dispatched, a patent was drawn, appointing John of Gaunt Richard's lieutenant for the kingdom of France, with powers scarcely inferior to royal^s. John of Gaunt had in the interval renewed the truce with the

^s Rymer, 7 Ric. 2, Sep. 12.

Scottish government^t, proceeding in this instance upon the same principles of policy as had regulated his conduct two years before. The day of the marches, as it was called (or the period of the expiration of the truce then concluded), being come, some straggling parties of Scots had committed depredations on the English borders. But the Scottish government disavowed their hostilities, and offered to make compensation for the injuries which had been sustained. Such being the state of the parties, John of Gaunt willingly submitted to the unpopularity to be incurred by not drawing his sword for purposes of vengeance. The moral principles by which he was guided were too firm, to suffer him to proceed to the wanton effusion of blood. It is a trite and a plausible argument, to say that the inflicting of vengeance is the true means for the repressing of injury. But he knew by inference, and had found by experience, that in a case of this sort the contrary is the truth.

^t Rymer, 7 Ric. 2, Jul. 12.

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John of
Gaunt ap-
pointed
lieutenant
of France.

Miscarriage
of Spen-
cer's ex-
pedition.

Vengeance had always inspired into this rugged nation the thirst of further injury; while the negotiation and honourable intercourse he cultivated with the heads of that nation, operated to shut the injury within narrower bounds, and might in time have introduced a juster and nobler way of thinking between two people inhabiting the same island and speaking the same language.

The king of Castille, having terminated this affair, entered upon measures to improve, and give stability, if possible, to the acquisitions of the bishop of Norwich. But the purpose was frustrate and ineffectual. Almost before his commission was signed, the fate of the campaign was decided. The court of France, which had at first viewed the undertaking of these pious crusaders with contempt, was roused to resistance. Charles VI. marched against them with an army. The towns which had been taken were recovered with as much rapidity as they had been lost: and the episcopal commander was glad to obtain, through the mediation of the duke of Brittany, permission to return to England

with the remains of his shattered forces^a. CHAP.
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 The powers, communicated to the king of 1383.
Truce.
 Castille, equally applied to the treating with
 the enemy, as to the encountering him in the
 field, as either should be found advisable:
 and, as the occasion of successful military ad-
 venture was escaped, a congress was sought
 for and obtained with the dukes of Berri and
 Brittany between Boulogne and Calais; and,
 soon after Christmas, a truce was agreed upon
 between the two powers, to endure till the
 ensuing autumn^x. Henry earl of Derby,
 afterward Henry IV, of the same age as
 Richard II, was joined with his father in this
 negotiation.

^a Froissart, Chap. cxxxix, &c.

^x Rymer, 7 Ric. 2, Jan. 26.

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CONSPIRACY AGAINST THE KING OF CASTILLE.—
 CONTENTION RESPECTING THE MAYORALTY OF
 LONDON.—CHAUCER TAKES PART IN THIS AFFAIR.
 —SUBORNATION OF FRIAR LATIMER.—MEASURES
 TO BRING JOHN OF GAUNT TO A PUBLIC TRIAL.
 —RECONCILIATION BETWEEN HIM AND RICHARD
 II.—CONSEQUENCES OF THESE PROCEEDINGS.

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Critical age
 of Ri-
 chard II.

THE project against the life and honour of the king of Castille became every day more ripe for execution. The courtiers of Richard II. continually incurred further unpopularity. A dissolute prince and profligate ministers made themselves no sincere friends either among the nobility or the people. Richard was now seventeen. This, in a youth of promise, is a very interesting period of human life. If we find him without discard-

ing the blooming appearance, the frankness and graceful levity of his early years, reflecting upon his destination, cultivating a suitable reverence for his own powers, cherishing his unsullied character, and changing the restraint of tutors and pedagogues for self-tuition and a generous love of improvement, it is impossible we should observe this vernal season without sentiments of affection. But, as much as such dispositions will be confessed interesting and lovely, so much shall we be disposed to regard with disapprobation and horror a youth, aspiring to manhood only that he may be more arrogantly vicious, a stranger to principle, sobriety or emulation, impudent, unthinking and dissipated, careless of his own reputation, and void of respect for age, or station, or talents, or experience, or virtue. This is nearly the most unnatural and monstrous of human characters; ignorance without deference, assuming manners with a total absence of merit, and a spring that brings with it no hope of a brilliant summer or of a ripe and luxuriant autumn.

As the court of Richard, constituted as it

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Projects of
the cour-
tiers.

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Their com-
petitors.

Edmund of
Langley.

Thomas of
Wood-
stock.

John of
Gaunt.

Henry of
Boling-
broke.

now was, could advance small pretensions upon the public esteem, its members were proportionably jealous and impatient of that reputation in others, which they were neither able nor willing to cultivate for themselves.

The king's three uncles were of course the first objects of their anxiety. The characters

of each have been partly described. The earl of Cambridge was of a weak and easy temper,

and occasioned them little umbrage. The earl of Buckingham had more energy and enterprise in his disposition than either of his brothers. But he was still young : he was

only twenty-nine years of age, while the king of Castille was forty-four. He was besides hasty, outrageous and fierce ; and this

character they less dreaded than the grave and masculine demeanour of John of Gaunt.

Perhaps the temper and manners of the young earl of Derby contributed to swell their animosity to his father. He was of the same

age as Richard ; but the dispositions of the two princes were in entire contrast with each other. The earl of Derby was as specious,

as Richard was imprudent and dissolute. His

mind was cool, subtle and ambitious; his carriage was gentle, condescending and popular. These features, the courtiers of Richard thought, constituted him a dangerous rival to their master. They further judged it a master-stroke of policy to strike at the king's eldest uncle at once. If he were destroyed, they thought the whole royal family would be subdued, and would either consent to join in dishonourable league with his murderers, or at least to purchase their own safety by a tame neutrality in the affairs of government.

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It has often been found a characteristic of courts, that they contemplate a murder under the forms of law, with perfect steadiness, and with no movements of compunction. All sense of justice gives way in their breast to calculations of expediency; and expediency soon subsides from a public consideration into a question completely selfish. They prepare the instruments of murder in secret, and no explosion precedes the stroke. They view the human figure of their destined victim; in their hearts they confess his innocence; they

Features of
the con-
spiracy.

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rejoice in his total freedom from apprehension and alarm; and they proceed to the meditated catastrophe. They drag him before a bar of self-named justice; they proceed with all the tedious forms of legal investigation; and they endeavour at one blow to destroy his reputation and his life. There is something more abhorrent to the genuine feelings of the human heart in this, than in any other species of assassination. It was thus that the ministers of Richard, the young earl of Oxford, and his seemingly decent and honourable associates, proceeded with slow and measured steps to the destruction of the first man, in rank, in proud and uncorrupted honour, and in qualifications for government, in the kingdom of England.

Contention
respecting
the may-
oralty of
London.

It is impossible, with the slender sources of information we possess, to trace the steps of this black and infamous design. The first transaction which has come down to us in the series, is a contention respecting the office of chief magistrate of the city of London, in which the king of Castille appears to have countenanced the popular candidate.

Perhaps this prince anticipated the plan which was formed against his life, and found this, for some reasons, to be the proper place to make his stand against the enemy. His conduct in the present instance seems to be the first example of his deviating from the rule he had laid down to himself, of not interfering in the internal government of his country. We are reduced to derive our principal information respecting the affair from Walsingham; an historian, who not only shows himself on all occasions in the highest degree prejudiced against John of Gaunt, but who had an additional source of prejudice in the present instance, the popular candidate being, as he has informed us, a Lollard^a.

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The project for the destruction of John of Gaunt is stated on all hands to have been concerted with sir Robert Tresilian, chief justice of the king's bench, who was to adjust the legal proceedings, to combine the articles

Sir Robert
Tresilian.

^a Walsingham, A. D. 1382.

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1384.

Sir Nicholas
Brembar.

of accusation, and to see that the preliminary steps led to the fore-determined conclusion. Sir Robert had been particularly distinguished by his dexterity and dispatch in the trial of the insurgents, after the destruction of their leader in Smithfield. Stow observes, speaking of the sentence against John Ball, that this celebrated preacher “ had judgment given him by sir Robert Tresilian knight a most skilfull justice, as a traytour to be drawne, hanged, headed and bowelled ^b.” Sir Nicholas Brembar, the court candidate for the mayoralty, was the partner, in his public operations, of sir Robert Tresilian. He was, at least when the barons of the realm confederated against Richard, and the king found it necessary to proceed in a more advised and deliberate manner than he had previously done, a member of Richard’s most secret councils ; and he and Tresilian perished together upon the gallows in the year 1388. Sir Nicholas Brembar was one of the citizens

^b Stow, A. D. 1381.

who was knighted on the memorable occasion of the death of Wat Tyler. He is said by Stow, who, like all our other annalists, follows the leading of Walsingham, and paints every thing in the colours most unfavourable for John of Gaunt, to have been “oft times made maior against the minde of the citizens^c.”

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The name of the popular candidate was John of Northampton. He is handed down to us as a great stickler for the reformation of manners. He was mayor, as was not unfrequent in these times, for the two preceding years, and is said to have represented to his fellow-citizens that, if he were not rechosen, the most deplorable profligacy would ensue^d. He had been the author of certain edicts against usury, which were so favourably thought of in these times, that, several years after, the house of commons petitioned the king, that the orders made by

John of
North-
ampton.

^c A. D. 1388. See also Knighton, ad eundem ann.

^d Stow, Survey of London : temporal government.

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John of Northampton, late mayor of London, against usury, might be executed throughout the realm^e. He was also severe against fornicators, adulterers and incestuous persons; and on this subject became involved in a contest with the bishop of London, who insisted that such irregularities were only punishable by spiritual jurisdiction^f. John of Northampton and his partisans alleged, that the clergy in their parishes were exceedingly remiss and corrupt on this subject, being accustomed to compound these offences for money, and that it was therefore necessary they should be subjected to the animadversion of some more impartial and vigilant authority.

State of the
city of
London.

The whole reign of Richard II. is distinguished by a certain hostility and contest between the court and the city of London. London had grown great and powerful, like the commercial towns of Flanders and Italy;

^e Stow, Survey of London, by Strype, Book V, Chap. VI, A. D. 1382.

^f Walsingham, A. D. 1382.

its inhabitants were fully sensible of their newly acquired importance, and were prompt to repress the excesses and arbitrary measures of the king's favourites. The government however was much less sensible of their weight than they themselves were: a new power rising in a state is scarcely ever admitted to its due degree of ascendancy by the elder authority, but through debate and struggle and resolute contention. Richard is affirmed by the historians to have regarded the Londoners as his enemies; first, because they were forward to remonstrate against and censure the proceedings of his ministers, and, secondly, because they possessed great wealth; and he was accustomed, when they had fallen under his displeasure, to oblige them to purchase his forgiveness with large contributions in money. In the year 1392, under pretence of a riot, he committed the mayor, sheriffs, and certain principal citizens, to separate prisons, and published an ordinance, "that from thenceforth the Londoners should not choose nor have any maior, but that the king should appoint one of his knights to be ruler of the

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1384.

Hostile conduct of
Richard II.
toward the
citizens.

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citie: their privileges were revoked, their liberties disannulled, and their laws abrogated^h.”

The question of the mayoralty of the present year was a step in the progress of that contention between the king and the citizens, which came to its crisis in 1392. Sir Nicholas Brembar, as we have seen, and no doubt others, had repeatedly been imposed as a mayor upon the city by the mere fiat of the court, in neglect of the choice of the citizens. This the popular party resolved no longer to endure. They probably fixed upon John of Northampton for the individual to be put forward on the present occasion, as being a man of more consideration, and more likely to unite the good wishes of the electors, than any other. He was, as we are told, a man of great wealthⁱ; his abilities may be presumed, from the circumstance of an ordinance

^h Walsingham and Stow, ad ann. Rymer, 16 Ric. 2, Jun. 25 and Jul. 22.

ⁱ Walsingham, A. D. 1382.

of his framing having been several years after consulted by the legislature as a model; the principles of his conduct as to public manners were vigorous, and not destitute of such knowledge or judgment as at that time existed in the community; and he was an adherent of the opinions of Wicliffe, which were now in the height of their popularity. The result however was favourable to the court party. Their intrigues on the present occasion were so assiduous, and their menaces so alarming, as ultimately to fix the majority of votes in favour of the candidate who was regarded by his fellow citizens with horror and aversion.

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Chaucer was engaged in this civic contention, as an abettor of the cause of John of Northampton^k. To the part he took on the present occasion he was urged by some of the strongest motives that can influence the mind of man. The proceedings of the court were regarded by their authors as the first

Chaucer involved in this affair.

His attachment to John of Gaunt.

^k Testament of Love, passim. See the following Chapter.

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step toward the destruction of the king of Castille, a prince with whom Chaucer was connected by the obligation of a thousand benefits and by a long and most intimate friendship, whose youth he had probably contributed to form, whose virtues he probably admired and loved, whose apology (if we are correct in our explanation of the Complaint of the Black Knight) he had recently composed, and with the steadiness and rectitude of whose character he regarded the welfare of his country as intimately connected. There was some link of combination, that we are now unable to discover, which made the destruction of the city's liberties an indispensable preliminary to the ruin of John of Gaunt.

His patriotic
sentiments.

Chaucer was also guided by the powerful interest which he felt in the welfare and prosperity of the city of London. He tells us of himself, in a passage formerly quoted¹, "More kindly love have I to that place, than to

¹ Vol. I, Chap. I, p. 6.

any other in yerth." We may be sure therefore that he witnessed, with a quick feeling and with powerful indignation, the practice of the profligate court of Richard, which was growing into a habit, of imposing upon his native place a chief magistrate by their arbitrary will. Chaucer must have been unworthy the name of a man, if he had seen the destruction of the liberties of his native place, combined with a black and infamous plot against the life of an innocent prince, perhaps the worthiest and most valuable member of the commonwealth, and not have exerted every faculty he possessed, to defeat it.

It is related of John of Northampton on this occasion, that "with his seditions he filled the city full of *comber* [his patronymic name is said to have been Combertoun], and went up and downe with a multitude of seditious people to guard him, not once, but oftentimes, to the terrour of many^m." These are the terms in which the proceedings of a

Sir Robert
Knolles
marches
against
the citi-
zens.

^m Walsingham and Stow, ad ann.

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popular candidate in a public election are usually described by his opponents. The seditions of John of Northampton however were presently quelled; sir Nicholas Brembar was installed in the office to which he had been unduly chosen; and sir Robert Knolles quelled the insurrection, by "drawing one of the ringleaders out of his house, and committing him to prison, who else was saide to have conspired the murther of sir Nicholas and many other worthy menⁿ." According to another account, the disorder was suppressed by sir Robert Knolles striking off the head of one of the rioters^o. The pretended rioter, who was thus put to death by military execution, appears to have been John Constantine, one of the most eminent of the citizens. The king of Castille and his partisans were entirely defeated. They acted on the usual principles of a civic contention, and confided in the spirit of the popular party to counteract the intrigues of the court. But

ⁿ Stow, ad ann.

^o Walsingham, ad ann.

the ministers of Richard preferred a briefer and more peremptory mode of proceeding, in which John of Gaunt was neither ready nor willing to cope with them.

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Mr. Tyrwhit very naturally expresses his surprise at Chaucer being so deeply engaged in what he styles "a trifling city-riot^p."

Estimate of
the cause
in which
Chaucer
was en-
gaged.

We may be certain that it did not appear to Chaucer in the light in which it appeared to Mr. Tyrwhit. He who would consider justly the transactions of distant ages, must be on his guard against the superciliousness and apathy which the interval of centuries is apt to produce upon him. Perhaps, if Richard had never resumed the city's charter in 1392, "revoked its privileges, disannulled its liberties, and abrogated its laws," London would not have been a jot more free at present than it now is. Yet ought I to blame the contemporary who felt indignation at the arbitrary and rapacious proceeding? Perhaps, if John of Gaunt had actually fallen by the machin-

^p Preface, Appendix C, note i.

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1384. ations of judge Tresilian, we might not at the present hour experience any ill effects from it. Perhaps, if Algernon Sydney had escaped the unprincipled persecution of judge Jefferies, England might not now be happier than it is. Human beings must be contented to act in darkness and obscurity, and possessing only the materials of an uncertain guess as to the result of their actions. A candid observer therefore will look less to this, than to the feeling from which the actions sprung. We ought to love and admire the individual who generously sacrifices himself for the public, though the sacrifice should be useless. Besides, human beings must and ought to be powerfully influenced by motives which will make no important figure an hundred years after they are dead. Of what consequence will it probably be to future ages, whether my child, who has fallen into the river, be saved or drowned? Yet the father who in the moment of danger could entertain that thought, and from that consideration bid his heart cease to palpitate, would deservedly be regarded with execration by mankind.

Chaucer regarded the infant liberties of the city of London with all the warmth of affection. He considered her citizens as his brothers, and their posterity as his kindred. This era in the history of our metropolis was calculated to excite an high interest in his susceptible mind. Till about the thirteenth century, the inhabitants of England had consisted almost entirely of two classes: the proud and haughty barons or holders of knight's fees, on the one hand; and the villains, cultivators of the soil or mechanics, entirely at the disposal of their lords, on the other. Then came the dawn of what almost solely deserves the name of freedom. The wealthy merchants of England, as has been before remarked^a, were enabled to enter into a sort of competition with the ancient barons, which these latter wished perhaps, but were not able, to despise. The citizens had not yet learned the sordid habits of later times, and appear to have copied with success the purest models

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^a Vol. I, Chap. I, p. 19.

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Success of
the court.

Chaucer
flies.

that were afforded them by their contemporaries. The names of Walworth, Philpot, Picard and Whittington rank among the most venerable in the annals of the fourteenth century.

The contest for the first magistracy of the city was terminated in the present instance by the interposition of a military despotism. Sir Robert Knolles, who, in the predatory wars of the Companions after the peace of Bretigni, had been accustomed to overbear and oppress the unarmed citizen, put some of the leaders to death, and conveyed others into strong imprisonment. John of Northampton was committed first to Corffe-Castle in the county of Dorset, and afterward to Carisbrook-Castle in the isle of Wight^r. A resolution was taken to bring him to trial for his life before judge Tresilian, the convenient instrument of the court. A similar process was prepared against Chaucer, who fled for safety to the province of Zealand.

^r Mss. Rymer, Ric. II, Vol. II, No. 109, 129.

During these transactions John of Gaunt was absent upon the public service in Scotland. He was not able on this, as he had been on former occasions, to prevent the commencement of hostilities on the borders. The antipope had sent his letters of crusade into Scotland; and this, cooperating with the old jealousies between the two countries, overpowered for the present the conciliatory and honourable modes of proceeding of the king of Castille. He was compelled to repress the inroads of the Scots by force of arms; he took possession of Edinburgh, and drove their forces beyond the wall of Antoninus. They then consented to the renewal of the truce^s.

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John of
Gaunt
marches
against
the Scots,

A parliament was summoned to meet at Salisbury on the twentieth of April^t. There seems always to have been some secret meaning, some mysterious and crooked project in hand, when in these times the parliament was not permitted to resort to its customary place

Parliament
at Salis-
bury.^s Walsingham, ad ann.^t Cotton, 7. Ric. 2.

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1384.

of assembly. The design in the present instance pointed at John of Gaunt. The ministers of Richard conceived that the time had arrived to strike their final blow. They had suppressed, or awed into silence, the party of this prince in the metropolis. They had vested the legal powers of the city-government in a creature of the court. They had driven Chaucer into exile, whose advice might have been of the most essential service to his master, and whose talents might perhaps have aided in digesting the materials of his defence. Still it seems they did not think they had sufficiently secured the success of their conspiracy, unless they removed the legislature to a distance from London.

Information
of Friar
Latimer.

When the parliament met, the king of Castille was still absent upon his expedition into Scotland. Shortly afterward he returned. An accusation of the gravest nature was then preferred against him. One John Latimer, an Irishman and a friar of the order of Carmelites, presented to the king a schedule containing an information against John of Gaunt, in which he was charged with a de-

sign to destroy the king, and to usurp the crown". Time, place, and other circumstances were specified in the scroll; and the writer added a solemn adjuration upon the sacrament which he had that day received, that every particular contained in his allegation was true. Very contrary to the intention of the authors of the accusation, John of Gaunt entered the presence of Richard, the moment after he had read the paper he had received". With the ingenuousness natural to his age, the young king displayed in his countenance and manner the dark thoughts which he had just conceived of his uncle. John of Gaunt observed the extraordinary coldness and severity of his demeanour, and urged him to explain the cause of his anger. Richard, after some hesitation, was overcome by the importunity of his uncle, and put into the hands of John of Gaunt the scroll he had been perusing. The accused prince discovered all the surprise, indignation and horror, na-

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communi-
cated to
John of
Gaunt.

His de-
fence.

* Walsingham, ad ann.

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tural on such an occasion. He protested that not a thought had ever entered his mind injurious to his nephew, and that the continual object of his solitudes had been the king's prosperity and welfare. With the vehemence and flow of language which innocence supplies to a proud and elevated mind, he asked, how he could be more eligibly situated than as the first and richest subject in the realm, and whether Richard could believe that the English nation would endure that he should occupy a throne to which he had prepared the way by the murder of his nephew? He intreated however that the charges against him might undergo the minutest investigation, and requested that in the mean time friar Latimer might be committed to custody, and not suffered to elude the scrutiny of his accusations. Richard was convinced, by what was said, of his uncle's integrity, and cheerfully assented to every thing he proposed. The unfortunate accuser was committed to the custody of two knights, one of whom was sir John Holland, the king's uterine brother, to be produced hereafter for the

deliberate examination of what he had alleged. CHAP.
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The feelings of John of Gaunt were those of a proud and unsullied honour, basely aspersed. He broke out into no violence; he did not condescend to insinuate that this miserable friar had been suborned by persons who had views deeper than his own; and he conducted himself with that firmness and sobriety which strongly conciliated the favour and good opinion of his nephew. The feelings of his friends were far different. They could not endure with patience to see the life and honour of so excellent a prince thus trifled with by a set of unprincipled courtiers for their private ends. The earl of Buckingham no sooner heard of what had passed, than he hurried to the king, burst into his chamber, and, disdaining all decorum in the vehemence of his resentment, declared, with a torrent of oaths and execrations, that he was ready to fight any one, even Richard himself, who should dare to utter an insinuation to the disadvantage of his brother's character.

1384.

Resentment
of Tho-
mas of
Wood-
stock.

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XLIX.

1384.
Catastrophe
of the
informer.

A further circumstance took place, strongly demonstrative of the barbarity and lawlessness of these times. Sir John Holland had married the eldest daughter of the king of Castille, and was no less zealously attached to his interest than the earl of Buckingham. He had the unhappy accuser in his custody; he was persuaded of his father-in-law's innocence; and entertained little doubt as to the quarter from which the base conspiracy had originated. With the sternness of a feudal baron and a soldier, he questioned the friar as to the persons who had prompted his conduct, he threatened him, and at length subjected him, as it is said with his own hands, to the torture. The friar expired in consequence of the severity with which he was treated. His keepers, even in death regarding him as a traitor, caused his body to be dragged through the streets upon a sledge, as if he had been publicly convicted of the crimes with which they charged him.

Inferences
from this
event.

Walsingham says that, while the friar lived, he was universally regarded as a false accuser; but that, being thus illegally put to

death, the innocence of John of Gaunt was rendered suspicious, and many now believed him guilty, who had before been satisfied of his loyalty and honour. This however is not the natural construction of what passed. The conduct of sir John Holland exactly corresponds with that of the earl of Buckingham, and in both we perceive the indignation of men convinced of the untainted innocence of their friend. The manner in which the indignation expressed itself belongs to the general character of the times, and not to the circumstances of this particular case, except as it serves to show the unbounded warmth of attachment which the qualities of John of Gaunt excited in his friends. Add to which, it would be contrary to every principle of reasoning, to infer, from the supposed ambiguity attending the fate of friar Latimer, a guilt in the king of Castille which would stand in complete opposition to the whole tenor of his actions. An assassination, such as was spoken of in the present accusation, was not correspondent to the spirit of the times. If John of Gaunt had designed

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1384.

Improbability of
the accusation.

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the subversion of his nephew's reign, he would have formed a hostile party in parliament, he would have given birth to a confederacy of the discontented barons, and have excited a civil war against the crown; in a word, he would have pursued the same measures, as his brother, Thomas of Woodstock, subsequently adopted with that intention. By such means it was perhaps practicable for him to have obtained the crown. He would have swelled the multitude of his partisans; he would have brought them into a situation in which their reconciliation with the crown would have been desperate; he would have moulded them gradually to his purpose, and insensibly familiarised them to the idea of his mounting the throne. It was by these means that the descendants of the house of York afterward deprived the posterity of the king of Castille of the crown. Nothing could be more just than the argument employed by John of Gaunt in his expostulation to Richard, that he would have found, in a naked and abrupt assassination, not his path to royalty, but to the detestation

and abhorrence of the whole mass of his countrymen.

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The king of Castille, having escaped the snare which had thus been spread for his life, was again employed, as before, in negotiation with the princes of France^x. He accordingly passed the seas for that purpose; and the result of his journey was an extension of the truce to the ensuing spring^y.

1384.
John of
Gaunt
employed
in France.

The frankness of his temper led John of Gaunt to believe that all further question of treasonable accusation against him was now dismissed. But the feelings of the ministers of Richard were very different from his imaginations. The more they found themselves baffled and disgraced in their first exertion, the more intently did they set themselves, with new caution and duplicity, to pursue the purpose in which they were embarked.

They first resolved, as the adversaries of the king of Castille appear uniformly to have done, to improve the advantage of his absence on the public service. They brought his par-

Trial of
John of
North-
ampton.

^x Rymer, 7 Ric. 2, May 27.

^y Ditto, 8 Ric. 2, Sep. 14.

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tisan, John of Northampton, to trial. The chaplain of this citizen was the principal witness against him, "uttering many things that he went about and had devised, as well to the hinderance and harme of the king, as of the city of London." Northampton remonstrated against the proceeding, and maintained that his trial "ought not to passe in absence of his lord the duke of Lancaster." But he was silenced by judge Tresilian, who in reply exclaimed, "John, the naughty deeds that are objected against thee, thou oughtest to refel by battel, or els by the lawes of the land to be drawne, hanged and quartered." In conclusion, sentence of confiscation and perpetual imprisonment was pronounced against him². One of the sheriffs of the preceding year and another principal citizen were included in the same sentence.

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Further
conspiracy
against
the king
of Castille.

The ministers of Richard saw their error in not having in the former instance sufficiently trusted their master with the secret of their designs. They had reposed with con-

² Walsingham and Stow, ad ann.

fidence upon the effect of the forged accusation of friar Latimer; but the accidentally coming in of the innocent prince had overturned their contrivances. They now proceeded after a different manner. They considered that Richard, however specious and engaging might be his manner to strangers, had a mind, to which the principles of rectitude had never been communicated, or in the soil of which the seeds of rectitude refused to germinate. He was madly addicted to his pleasures. They had only to represent to him his venerable uncle as the bar to his licentiousness, in order to obtain his assent to the blackest project they could suggest to him. They told him that he was a monarch, and that the unseasonable intrusion of grave and severe lessons upon his youth was treason. They asked him for what purpose the plenitude of power was confided to his hands, if he was not to use it for the removal of obstacles to his enjoyment? They assured him that the people would never presume to enquire into the reasons of his measures; but were impressed with that becoming deference for their king, which would lead them to

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 believe that whatever severities he thought
 proper to adopt against his uncle were right.

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A further variation introduced by them into the project of the present year, was that, whereas in the former instance they had deemed it safe to arraign the king of Castille before a parliament assembled for that purpose at a distance from the metropolis, they now held it requisite to make their blow more sudden, and of less publicity. A special commission was given to judge Treilian to try the accusations it might be thought proper to prefer^a; and thus the first prince of the blood was to be made the victim of an obscure, irregular and illegal jurisdiction.

The project was already in great forwardness, and a writ for his arrest in order to trial was made out, when intelligence was conveyed to him, by some secret friend, of the danger in which he stood. He was greatly astonished at what he heard, and saw that this was no time to trifle with his safety.

^a Walsingham, ad ann.

If Richard, who had so lately and so fully been convinced of his innocence, yielded his assent to this new proceeding, he saw that he had neither favour nor justice to expect from the throne. He understood the corrupt practices which then prevailed in the courts of law, and how unblushing a contempt for integrity and honesty, was hid under the awe-inspiring robes of national justice. He knew that if, with his rank and public importance, he were once arraigned at the bar on a capital indictment, nothing but a powerful interposition of force could save him from the scaffold. The ministers of the crown, after having put upon him so foul an indignity, would never dare to let him go free. The voice of innocence in that place, instead of availing to baffle their conspiracy, would sound like the weakest and most driving pedantry that ever was devised.

In this emergence the measure adopted by the king of Castille was to withdraw himself privately and hasten to his strong castle of Pomfret, which he fortified with great diligence and care. Joan, the dowager princess of Wales, who only survived this period by

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Retires to
Pomfret.Mediation
of the
king's
mother.

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Reconcilia-
tion of
John of
Gaunt and
the king.

son from the guilt and ruin upon the brink of which he stood. She had shut herself up in retirement, stung to the heart at the unhappy courses in which the young king was engaged; but she could not remain inactive on so awful an occasion as had now arrived. She undertook in her own person to mediate a peace between the king and his uncle, and, though corpulent and unfit for travel, journeyed with diligence between the one and the other: and such were the unaffected expressions of loyalty on the part of John of Gaunt, and so earnest and impressive the expostulations addressed to the king by his mother, that the breach was healed, and a perfect reconciliation effected^b.

Conse-
quences
of these
proceed-
ings.

This was the crisis of the reign of Richard. Such was the equanimity and placable temper of John of Gaunt, and so dearly did he cherish the principles of loyalty to his kinsman, and zeal for the public tranquillity, as never to have betrayed during the remainder of his life any resentment of the deadly

^b Walsingham, ad ann.

offences which the king had committed against him. He shortly after set out upon an expedition into Spain, in which he was engaged for some years, and after his return showed himself on all occasions the steadiest and most disinterested friend the unhappy Richard ever had. But such were not the feelings of the public in general, or of the friends of the king of Castille in particular. Richard, by consenting, on the most frivolous pretences, and with no inducement to impel him but his infatuated love of dishonourable pleasure, to bring his uncle to the scaffold, had established a character with the nation, which no further instances of weakness or guilt could aggravate, and no subsequent amendment could erase. Thomas of Woodstock, whose intemperate zeal in the cause of his eldest brother has been described, was of a very different cast of mind from his. With abilities which have been considered as superior to those of John of Gaunt, he had an impetuousness of temper, which did not easily yield to the control of reason or principle. The loyalty of John of Gaunt was proof against every trial; but Thomas

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of Woodstock was much more under the empire of his private feelings. From this moment he cast off all forbearance for Richard. He contemplated with impatience and horror the crime of conspiring against the life of the most eminent, and, as he believed, the most virtuous, citizen of England. He despised the king as a man, and he scorned to make any artificial distinctions between the man and the magistrate. He swore eternal animosity against his sovereign. No sooner had the winds and waves borne his elder brother to a distant clime, and delivered him from the ascendant of his well-harmonised temper and deliberate wisdom, than he began a war against Richard which knew no restraint from kindred, loyalty or humanity. His hostility, taken up on grounds so impressive and powerful, ended only with his life; and both Richard and himself finally became the victims of this inexpiable contention.

END OF THE THIRD VOLUME.

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Godwin, William,

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